

Ana Duarte Melo, Ian Somerville, Gisela Gonçalves (Editors)

Organisational & Strategic Communication Research: European Perspectives II



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Title Organisational and Strategic Communication
Research: European Perspectives II

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ISBN 978-989-8600-36-3 (e-book)
978-989-8600-39-4 (impresso)

Cover Illustration: Madalena Sena, Labcom

Format eBook, 157 páginas

Publishing Date 2015, june

Publisher CECS - Centro de Estudos de Comunicação e Sociedade
Universidade do Minho
Braga . Portugal

Editor Moisés de Lemos Martins

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This book is dedicated to our friend and colleague Adela Rogojinaru. She was a full professor at the University of Bucharest and founder member and former chair of ECREA OSC Section. Adela is fondly remembered for her friendship, professionalism and academic contribution to the field of public relations and organizational communication.

INTRODUCTION

This e-book presents a selection of the research papers presented at the 5th European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA) Conference in Lisbon, November, 2015. The book reflects the work of researchers within the Organisational and Strategic Communication (OSC) Section of ECREA from different backgrounds and higher education institutions in Europe and highlights the diverse professional and scientific interests of the Section. At the 5th ECREA Conference, the OSC Section selected almost 50 papers from the 90 submitted abstracts, which were organized into two specialist panels (“Government Public Relations in Europe: Critical Perspectives” and “Inconsistencies Organizational Communication”), eight parallel sessions and one poster session. Those papers selected for Lisbon 2015 made a valuable contribution to key contemporary communications debates and issues. The peer reviewed papers presented in this volume share findings and “state of the art” critical reflections, which address the core objective of the Organisational and Strategic Communication Section of ECREA. They also continue the tradition of the promoting scientific knowledge in our broad and diverse field of research, which has been central to Section’s *raison d’être* since its creation in 2006.

The overarching theme of Lisbon Conference was ‘Communication for Empowerment: Citizens, Markets, Innovations’ and the call invited participants to “rethink the necessary balance between the public interest and the interests of the market, so as to ensure the promotion of citizenship, social capital and social inclusion”. Covering a range of subjects and perspectives, the papers in this e-book respond to that challenge and provide valuable explorations of how organisations face new challenges and find new balances between the logic of the market and the idea of active,

participatory citizenship. These issues are addressed through a changing communication paradigm characterized by innovative media technologies and resourceful media users and co-creators. The studies presented open up new paths for further research to critically understand the dynamics of power in communicative spaces increasingly dominated by social media and digital platforms. As in previous OSC Section publications (2012, 2013), research on issues of organisational communication in relation to empowerment, participation, democratisation and citizen engagement remain a central focus.

The first paper in the volume critically reflects on the digital sphere possibilities for citizen political participation and on the relationship building and management potential it configures, while at the same time questioning its real implementation, impact and results. In *'Online relationship management and digital participation in the political sphere: a communicative myth?'*, Gisela Gonçalves and Paulo Serra, from the University of Beira Interior, Labcom, Covilhã, in Portugal, focus their attention on the digital performance of Portuguese political parties in non-electoral periods. Findings indicate that although political parties frequently facilitate digital spaces to citizen participation, they use them to disseminate information but not to promote a democratic participative debate, avoiding direct interaction with the public.

Based on the exploratory case study of the Portuguese airline company (TAP), whose online presence results from a cross management of PR, marketing and customer support, this article draws attention to emergent practices of public relations through social media. In the paper *'The PR pyramid: the functions of public relations on social media'*, Patrícia Dias and José Gabriel Andrade, from the Research Center for Communication and Culture, Universidade Católica Portuguesa, Lisbon, Portugal, aim to identify the functions assumed by public relations when social media is adopted as an exploratory resource. They discuss its performance as a strategic tool for concrete implementation and critically observe the enhancement of the pivotal articulatory role of public relations within organizational communication.

The concept of empowerment and its uses and implications are at the core of the article by Ana Duarte Melo, from the University of Minho, Braga, Portugal, who critically analyses the interaction between consumer-citizens and advertising, exposing the paradoxical empowerment it configures by enabling participation, co-creation and giving a voice to the people and, simultaneously, promoting mining data, collecting insights, profiles, and

personal data that function as a deeper control of consumer and citizens by corporations and organisations. In *'The paradoxical empowerment of consumer-citizens through advertising'*, the author reflects on the social capital perspective of this interaction and concludes by pointing out consumer literacy and media awareness as a sustainable approach to this communication paradigm.

The emancipation of the specific professional field of internal communication is analysed in *'From amateur to expert: professionalization in the field of internal communication'* by Mark Verheyden, Katie Goeman and Jo Pierson, from the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium. This study questions whether the theoretical principles of more established fields of Public Relations are applicable to internal communication professionals and contribute to the creation of a professional identity. Through an online survey they collected relevant data, namely pointing out that although internal communication professionals are open to innovations, a gap between scholars and practitioners persists. The paper discusses further on the fragmentation of Public Relations due to the emancipation of specializations.

Catrin Johansson, from Mid Sweden University, Sweden, centres her research in the management field and portrays the paradigm shift from the command and control management to a more inclusive and responsive perspective that values the involvement of collaborators in decision making processes and promotes dialogue and empowerment. *'Empowering employees through communicative leadership'* present the leader's perception of the contribution of the "communicative leadership" approach to employee empowerment, assessing its transformational role in a multinational business organization.

Teresa Ruão, Isabel Correia Neves and Ricardina Magalhães, from the University of Minho, Braga, Portugal, propose *strategic science communication* to conceptualise strategic communication practices that use science popularization to reach successful organizational performance. In *'Science and strategic communication: how can universities attract high school students'*, the authors anchor their line of thought on the use of science communication as a component of the promotional mix prepared by universities to attract high school students to their graduate and postgraduate programmes and they tested their proposal through a survey designed to assess several criteria, inspired in Burns et al. (2003: 191) *vowel analogy*: awareness (familiarity), enjoyment (appreciation), interest (voluntary involvement), opinion (way of thinking), understanding (comprehension), interaction (contact activities)

and action (attitude). Results conclude to the pertinence of the strategic science communication concept in universities' communication mix at different levels, namely on the motivation of potential students to apply to higher education institutions.

Completing the selection for this volume is a paper which deploys a semiotic analysis of the visual rhetoric of corporate social responsibility analysing how it contributes to the definition of meaning and to the valorisation of companies that promote socially responsible action in their communication strategies. Andrea Catellani, from the Université Catholique de Louvain, in Belgium, bases his study on a significant corpus of semiotic analysis of the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) reports published between 2004 and 2013 by Total, an oil and gas French company. '*Visual aspects of CSR reports: a semiotic and chronological case analysis*' identifies different phases and typologies, and contributes to the understanding of CSR and its exploitation as part of organisational image and identity building.

Thank you to all contributors, reviewers, designers and thoughtful critics without whose contribution this e-book would not have been possible. Special thanks to Madalena Sena, from Labcom, for designing the cover illustration. We also wish to express our appreciation to the direction and the editorial team from the Communication and Society Research Centre, University of Minho, for supporting the idea of this book and its publication.

The editors,

Ana Duarte Melo, Ian Somerville and Gisela Gonçalves

The editors hereby declare that all texts, as well as the use of any copyrighted material, are the exclusive responsibility of the respective author(s).

ONLINE RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT AND DIGITAL PARTICIPATION IN THE POLITICAL SPHERE: A COMMUNICATIVE MYTH?

Abstract

Grounded in relationship management and political public relations theory, this study takes a critical look at politician-citizen online relationship building in non-electoral periods. Using the example of Portuguese political parties as a case study, participatory tools available on parties' websites, the interactive exchange observed and interviews with political communication managers are analysed to reflect on the Internet's potential for heightening citizen participation. Main results indicate that providing information is a predominant function over promoting interaction and that political parties offer online spaces for citizens to discuss and debate online but hardly join the conversation.

Keywords: participation, digital sphere, political communication, public relations theory

INTRODUCTION

Online media, especially since the emergence of Web 2.0, has brought with it an overall change in the political sphere, with high hopes for democratic renewal and improvement. In the current “media ecology” (Scolari, 2012), the Internet has become the cornerstone of political communication strategies. As political parties increasingly adopt new communication technology, they are also gradually providing opportunities for citizen participation and engagement online.

Studying politician-citizen-politician interaction in the online environment is very interesting when considering the theory of relationship management. This theory is that, in order for an organization to be successful, it needs to put effort into establishing and nurturing relationships with its

publics, balancing mutual interests (Ledingham, 2006, 2011). Research on relationship management in online political public relations is scarce, however, and the research in that field mainly focuses on the role of websites and web-based communication during electoral campaigns (e.g., Levenshus, 2010; Karlsson et al., 2013).

In an attempt to counter this trend, the overall purpose of the present study is to investigate how political parties manage their relationship with citizens, in non-electoral periods, using the example of Portuguese political parties as a case study. Participatory tools (e.g., e-mail, comments, social media) available on parties' websites and the interactive exchange observed will be at the centre of the reflection.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review is divided into two sections, comprising the theoretical context of online political communication and relationship management studies, from a political public relations perspective. Firstly, the study is contextualized within the on going debate about Internet potentialities for strengthening citizens' political and civic participation. Secondly, there is a reflection on how the specific properties in online media relate to certain aspects of relationship management and political public relations.

ONLINE POLITICAL COMMUNICATION, INTERACTION AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION

New media technologies have been analysed in contradictory ways by political communication scholars. Some have looked to online technologies as the solution to the malaises of democracy, allowing for "virtual community" (Rheingold, 1993) and "virtual democracy" (Scheer, 1994). Others saw technology as inherently dangerous to democracy, eroding social capital and community ties (Etzioni & Etzioni, 1999) and reducing the opportunity for collective action and civil debate (Street, 1992).

Research is also divided as it regards who will benefit from the new online environment. Some had argued that smaller political actors would have a greater chance of reaching voters as they have greater difficulty in gaining media access (Norris, 2003). Others, in line with the "normalization thesis", claimed that the bigger actors, the traditional offline players, are more visible on the Web, indicating that resources also affect Internet presence and use of the online resources (Gibson, Margolis, Resnick & Ward, 2003; Gibson & Ward, 2002). Thus, rather than affecting any major

changes in the rate or quality of democratic participation, the Internet is simply reproducing and thereby reinforcing existing social biases in participation (Margolis & Resnick, 2000).

Despite the contradictory readings on new media and politics, several studies continue to stress the novelty and democratic potentialities of the Internet as a tool for enhancing political trust, pluralism and widening political participation (Norris, 2003; Gibson, Ward & Lusoli, 2003, 2005). As online campaigns are based on interaction, they should reduce citizens' apathy and increase participation (Chadwick, 2006). Dahlgren (2005) also argues that the Internet might contribute to civic interaction by promoting horizontal communication, although the Internet "cannot promise a quick fix for democracy" (p. 151).

Nevertheless, in the study of political parties' websites in the USA and in the UK, Gibson *et al* (2003) found that providing information and generating resources were predominant functions over promoting participation; and that interactivity tended to be top-down, from the parties to the citizens. Schweitzer (2005) also mentioned that all studies about online campaigns emphasized the fact that the majority of political party and candidate websites favoured the informative function over the interactive and participatory functions (online discussions, surveys, online petitions, etc.).

The possibility of online interaction has led to most political communication research. But interaction is not synonymous with political participation. As Carpentier (2011) stressed, participation should not be confused with mere access to the media or to interaction between citizens and political actors. These concepts avoid the issue of power relations, or in Dahlgren's words (2014), "Democratic participation must at some point and in some way actualize power relations, however weak or remote they may seem" (p. 64). Voting embodies political participation and "manifests citizenship" (*ibid.*) but there are other forms of civic participation (e.g. lobbying, debating, petitioning, contacting one's representative). Inspired by Dahlgren, we see in the increasing use of ICT by citizens "a new field of civic practices that lies at the very heart of democracy" (Dahlgren, 2014, p. 65).

It is in this context that we understand the Internet's self-produced media functionality (Croteau, 2006; Howard, 2008) as a participatory mechanism that enables not only media production but also interaction. That is, all the actions performed by citizens using Internet tools, especially Web 2.0 (blogs, YouTube videos with the ability to comment, social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace, Flickr, broadcast e-mails with ability to

reply, etc.) are actions that allow citizens to create and share political content and get involved in social networks. Simply put, therefore, in this paper the focus will be on the “interactive exchange” (McMillan, 2006, p. 165) that can be observed between two social actors, politicians and citizens (or users).

RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT AND POLITICAL PUBLIC RELATIONS

The online media environment has been at the centre of much of the recent research in public relations. The importance of the two-way communication enabled by online tools has been particularly stressed by relationship management theory. According to Ledingham & Bruning (2000, p. xiii), the seeds for the relationship management approach in PR theory were sown in 1984, in an article authored by Ferguson, who argues that the core of PR is the relationship between an organization and its publics. This perspective was then disseminated through the rapid adoption of a relational definition in well-known PR handbooks like “Effective Public Relations” by Cutlip, Center and Broom (1994, p. 2), which claimed that PR is “the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success or failures depends”. Later on, Ledingham and Bruning (1998) proposed a preliminary definition of the organization-public relationship as “the state that exists between an organization and its key publics in which the actions of either entity impact the economic, social, political and/or cultural well-being of the other entity” (p. 62). Thus, an ideal organization-public relationship would be characterized by mutual positive interdependence.

To better understand this interdependence Ledingham and Bruning (1998) identified five dimensions of organization-public relationships that influence publics’ perception of their relationship with an organization: trust, openness, involvement, commitment and investment in the relationship. Moreover, the authors found that better perceptions of these aspects are correlated with more favourable dispositions toward an organization. *Trust* describes the feeling that those in the relationship can rely on each other. *Openness* refers to being engaged in communication in a frank way. *Involvement* means that both the organization and public are committed to furthering each other’s interests and thus maintain a long-term relationship. *Investment* “refers to the time, energy, feelings, efforts and other resources given to building the relationship” (p. 58).

Relationship management research had a strong boost due to the Internet’s potential to increase dialogic communication between organizations and their publics (Jo & Kim, 2003; Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007; Park

& Reber, 2008; Bortree & Seltzer, 2009). A strategic framework for creating dialogic relationships with publics through the Internet was provided first by Kent and Taylor (1998). Dialogue is “any negotiated exchange of ideas and opinions” (Kent & Taylor, 1998, p. 325) and represents efforts by those involved in a relationship to participate in an open and honest exchange.

Kent and Taylor (1998) identified five dialogic principles for organizations to use when building relationships through websites. First, organizations should use the Internet to establish a “dialogic loop”. In other words, websites should let publics question organizations and, more importantly, give organizations the opportunity to give feedback on their questions, concerns and problems (Kent & Taylor, 1998, p. 326). The dialogic loop could be achieved, for example, by giving readers permission to publish comments and replies to posts by an author on an official blog, and by also allowing the author to reply via forum or e-mail. The second principle focuses on the “usefulness of information”: websites should provide general information even when they include messages directed towards more specific publics (which is true, for example, for press rooms). Information about the organization and its history are always valuable to any public, provided that it is reliable. At the same time, offering useful information also achieves “the generation of returns visits”, the third dialogic principle. This is why it is important for organizations to update their websites often and make them attractive by including several resources (chat rooms, forums, interviews with specialists, publishing events, frequently-asked questions, space for opinion and discussion, links to social networks, among others).

According to Kent and Taylor (1998), “the intuitiveness/ease of the interface” and “the conservation of visitors” are also fundamental principles of promoting dialogic communication. Any Internet user wants to navigate websites intuitively and easily when looking for information. Balance between graphic and textual elements, easy menus and speed of page loads are, for that very reason, essential. When the aim is creating a relationship, browsing must be perfect to avoid losing visits. It is important to only include interesting links and avoid advertising. After all, an organization can only create a good relationship if Internet users visit the site regularly.

Although the 1998 article predates the participatory tools today available on the Internet, the dialogic principles still seem to be relevant to building and managing relations with key publics. Several studies have made use of Kent and Taylor’s framework to analyse blogs (Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007), Facebook pages (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009), Twitter (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010), and wikis (Hickerson & Thompson, 2009). Generally,

these studies argue that the dialogic loop should be encouraged, without forgetting to highlight the importance of organizations having public relations teams that monitor and reply quickly to issues raised by publics on online platforms.

The relationship management approach and online dialogic features are highly interesting for political public relations. With the intention of bridging public relations and political communication, (Stromback & Kioussis, 2011), brought the relationship management perspective into the equation, as can be noted in the following definition:

Political public relations is the management process by which an organization or individual actor for political purposes, through purposeful communication and action, seeks to *influence and to establish, build, and maintain beneficial relationships* [emphasis added] and reputations with its key publics to help support its mission and achieve its goals. (Stromback & Kioussis, 2011, p.8)

Similarly, Ledingham (2011, p. 237) agrees that political public relations and relationship management share a similar perspective, since both underscore the importance of relationships, and notes that they are not only formed through communication but also through action (e.g., lobby activities or political events).

However, in spite of the expansion of relationship management research on the Internet's potential for strengthening relationship efforts, little is known about the Internet's role at a strategic management level in relation to political communication. Some people may argue that political communication research is usually interested in election periods since political parties are more interested in garnering votes than in listening to constituents in their capacity as citizens. What relationship management theory alerts to is that a focus that is too centred on election campaigns does not allow for the management of a long term relationship (Karlsson et al., 2013). If, as in the field of corporations and brands, loyalty and trust are achieved over time, then it is important that political parties invest in creating and maintaining long-term relationships with citizens.

Since Obama's 2008 presidential campaign, known as "the first Internet election", there have been studies about the role of political party websites during electoral campaigns (e.g., Levenshus, 2010). However, they have not addressed how to strategically manage the Internet as a relationship-building tool in "normal", longer periods, i.e., the periods between campaigns. This study intends to contribute to fill this gap by centring attention on the case

of Portuguese political parties' websites, in regard to the participatory tools available and the interactive exchange observed.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on the literature review and assuming that creating and nurturing online relationships with citizens political parties may foster political participation, three research questions were established to guide data collection and analysis:

RQ1: How do Portuguese political parties integrate participatory tools into their websites?

RQ2: How do Portuguese political actors interact with citizens via the participatory tools available on their political websites?

RQ3: How do political parties' communication managers perceive and recommend the use of the participatory tools available on political websites?

The first and second research questions are more descriptive and help to understand which participatory tools are available on the websites of the five Portuguese parties that have parliamentary representation and, more importantly, how they are being used by political actors to interact with citizens. The third question aims to contribute to a more reflexive and critical approach to online communication possibilities by exploring political communication managers' perception of those participatory tools and how to strategically manage political actor-citizen relationships.

METHOD

This study utilized three separate methods: content analysis, a controlled experiment and semi-structured interviews. By using multiple methods of data collection, this study triangulated data to better describe and analyse the political actors' relationship management via websites.

With the comparative content analysis, the participatory tools present on the websites of the Portuguese political parties were examined, that is, the tools that allow citizens to create and share political content, get involved in social networks and interact with political actors. The political parties' website content was analysed over a period of 3 months (May-July

2012) and involved the five Portuguese parties that have parliamentary representation:

- CDS/PP – Democratic Social Centre/Popular Party (Christian democrats, office-seeking)
- PSD – Social Democratic Party (government, catch-all party)
- PS – Socialist Party (opposition, catch-all party)
- PCP – Portuguese Communist Party (Marxist, ideological party)
- BE – Left Bloc (Marxist, ideological party)

To understand how the content generated by Internet users, using the participatory resources available on the websites, is treated by the political parties, an experimental method was also adopted. According to Krupnikov and Levine (2011: p. 149), many of the advances in political communication research are due to the use of experiments. Generally, using the experimental method, messages sent are manipulated to better study the effect produced on a certain target audience over a certain period of time (Hansen & Pfau, 2011, p. 195).

With that aim in mind, three virtual profiles were created (one positive, one neutral and one negative) to test the reaction of political actors to citizens' questions through the participatory resources available on their websites: e-mail, comments on news stories on the website itself and on the Facebook profile linked to the website. The citizen-political party experimental interaction via political parties' websites was carried out from January to May 2013 (one week per month).

After analysing the data gathered using content analysis and the controlled experiment, semi-structured interviews with the five political parties' communication managers were carried out. The interviews, which took place between December 2013 and April 2014, lasted between 30 minutes and one hour and were digitally recorded and transcribed for accuracy. The analysis of the interview transcripts employed a broad thematic discourse framework, where findings were based on the recurrent themes, patterns and categories that surfaced in the discourse (Deacon et al., 2007). Conclusions were drawn by comparing the thematic findings from all interviews. The representative quotations provided in the results section are presented in italic type and have been edited (i.e. repetitions and interjections removed) for ease of understanding, into a narrative form.

RESULTS

PARTICIPATORY TOOLS

Using Ramo's (2014) website model of codification and analysis, the political party websites' participatory tools were identified and characterized. All tools allowing an active role from the publics were considered and analysed in relation to 3 aspects - presence, visibility and functionality:

1. Social media (Facebook, Twitter, Google, Hi5, MySpace, YouTube, Flickr, Sapo videos, Vimeo)
2. Web syndication (RSS)
3. Interactive resources: Comments; suggestions; questions; chat rooms; forums.
4. Contact details: e-mail, telephone, address
5. Specific section for participation: e.g., Blogs

Despite differences in number and characteristics, we find that all websites include participatory tools (presence aspect). The main findings are listed as followed:

- Only 3 of the 8 tools¹ are implemented on all websites: *contact details, suggestions and social media*.
- *Comments* and *RSS syndication* exist on 4 websites
- None of the websites include a *Blog*
- Social media is the most common resource on websites (e.g., "Follow us on Facebook")

All websites have easy to use interfaces, as well as clear, updated information; nevertheless, the visibility of the Internet participatory tools varies between websites, from almost hidden to extremely visible (on the landing page). The data shows a trend in the functionality aspect: a lack of participation (publication) in the comments section and a very low frequency of comments as well. An explanation for the low number and frequency of comments, and the almost complete lack of *chats* or *blogs* may also be the transfer of political opinion debate to the social media environment

¹ The 8 tools analysed were: contact details, comments, suggestions, social media, blogs, surveys, chat rooms, and RSS syndication.

(in particular, Facebook) – this hypothesis was further analysed with the interaction experiment.

INTERACTION VIA POLITICAL WEBSITES

With the controlled experiment it was intended to understand how citizens can use participatory internet tools available on political parties' websites and how political actors are actually using it (for example: if we send an e-mail, will we receive a reply? And how long does it take to receive that reply?). By creating three virtual identities (positive, negative and neutral), interaction with political parties via websites was tested (e-mail, comments both on the website's news stories and also on the Facebook page).

Overall, the five websites showed very low levels of interactivity; in one case, interactivity is even non-existent (CDS/PP) and in others, only contact via e-mail produced feedback (PCP). All the websites allow contact via e-mail (some after user registration), however, in fact, only 2 parties replied to the e-mail (PSD and PCP). In the case of PSD, the reply was signed by a PR practitioner. In the case of the PS website, it was found that the e-mail address did not work.

On the three websites that allow comments (for example, on news or videos) only one (PS) published them. However, comments did not receive any answer and the negative comment was erased/censured after a short period.

The only interaction visible on the website is in the comments section. This interaction is between website users (horizontal communication) that post their opinions. There was no reply to the comments from any official representative of the political party.

After accessing the Facebook page links from the websites, it is also evident that there is no interaction between political parties and citizens. Three parties have an official Facebook profile but only two allow posts to be published. In the case of PS, all positive, negative and neutral comments were posted, although there was no reaction from the party. On the PSD Facebook page, comments are not published and on the BE page only the Like/Share actions are available. Nevertheless, there is a large number of followers, who Like/Share the party's posts.

INTERVIEWS

Three main themes emerged regarding how the five political communication managers perceive and recommend the use of the participatory tools available on political websites: information and

disintermediation; private answers to public questions; and horizontal interaction.

As has been widely debated (e.g., Negrine & Papathanassopoulos, 2011), the changing media landscape offers new opportunities, by allowing political organizations to avoid established media and communicate directly with important publics. It is not surprising, then, as clearly confirmed by all the interviewees, that Portuguese political parties have recently been continually investing in improvements to their institutional websites in terms of design and interface, by integrating new tools (especially social media) and in terms of strategically choosing the content to be included in those spaces. This is supported by the formation of teams within the parties responsible for communication, including specialised professionals (three to seven people), showing, therefore, a move away from amateur work in the field of online communication.

All interviewees acknowledge the central role played by the online media in the political parties' current communication strategies. They view websites as structural elements in the party's information strategy, as an essential means to disseminate political standpoints quickly and, above all, without third-party mediation.

As one of the political communication managers stressed:

Online vehicles let us communicate the story exactly as it is. Most people in their daily lives interpret the political situation through media sources, which in turn have filters. On our channels, we present the situation exactly as it is for us, the message as we believe it should be conveyed to our publics, whether they are members or not. (Interview, Feb. 2014)

Information and disintermediation are two of the main characteristics attributed to websites. But although the websites work as the "*party's shop window*" and therefore use a top-down, one-directional communication organization, the interviewees did not fail to recognize the potential of two-directional, bottom-up organization in the contact made by citizens via e-mail or the *suggestions* or *comments* section.

"No message is left unanswered"; "When people send private questions we reply to those that we believe are worth replying to", say the communication managers when asked about the way contact from citizens via e-mail is managed. They admit, however, that little attention is given to contact resources, such as *suggestions* or *comments*, in favour of Facebook, which is more suited to interactivity and sharing opinions. Nonetheless, as

we will see later, there is also no official response from parties to comments on Facebook.

Although three websites (PS, PSD, CDS/PP) allow comments to be published on news stories, throughout the interactive experiment, only one of the comments was published (PS). Two reasons emerge in the answers given by the interviewees to explain this phenomenon: one practical and the other strategic. On the one hand, it is impossible for them to analyse the high number of comments received due to time constraints and limited human resources: “We don’t have an army behind the machine!”. On the other hand, the strategic choice to moderate all comments, without exception: “We do not publish comments that include offensive words, that clearly violate the Portuguese constitution or harassing messages” (Interview, Feb. 2014).

According to the interviewees, it is much more important to continually monitor the number of visitors to the website, the type of information that is most shared and/or commented on than to develop strategies for dialogic communication with visitors. They never, without exception, reply publically to statements left by visitors in the website’s public areas (e.g. *comments*), and prefer to reply by e-mail or even by telephone.

This policy of ‘public questions, private answers’ extends to social networks too. Just like on the websites, the communication policy followed is to disseminate information, even if it is formatted in accordance with the social network, both in the design of content (e.g. shorter texts, more photographs and videos), and the higher frequency of updates. But interaction, if there is any, is only between visitors and not between politicians and citizens.

The choice to provide horizontal communication to the detriment of politician-citizen interaction is stressed:

We choose not to debate issues on Facebook (...) It is too much of a risk to start a dialogue with citizens and have to justify standpoints. Because I might have arguments but others may also have some. And it would be a never-ending discussion. (Interview, Feb. 2014)

Another interviewee further argued that:

We do not react on Facebook because we do not want people to feel that we are conditioning their discussion. (Interview, Feb. 2014)

The interviewees, therefore, look to online resources as a prime vehicle for spreading information and not as an incentive for interaction

or dialogue between politicians and citizens. One of the interviewees even believes that new technology may be counterproductive:

Effective political participation cannot be mostly through digital channels. Although these channels may add something and incentivize, because of the information they make available (...) An interesting aspect for those who study these areas lies in the opposite situation: I believe that it would not be impossible to empirically prove that in many circumstances these [online] instruments are a factor in reduced participation. (Interview, Feb. 2014).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As has been found in other research contexts (e.g. Gibson, 2003; Schweitzer, 2005), providing information is a predominant function over promoting interaction or participation in political parties' websites. Our findings corroborate this assumption. Despite Portuguese political party websites' potential to foster dialogic communication and relationship building, when it came to engaging with users, the parties appeared somewhat reluctant. Political parties set the theme of the conversation, offer online spaces for citizens to discuss and debate online but hardly enter into dialogue.

The main findings that underlined this conclusion may be discussed in light of Kent and Taylor's (1998) five dialogic principles. According to the political communication managers, websites are developed to provide updated, dynamic and *useful information* to citizens (whether party members or not), which encourages visitors to *return to the website*. The websites also incorporate easy-to-use interfaces. For example, besides the e-mail contact and link to social networks, present on all websites, in some cases, *comments* and *suggestions* sections are also available. Participatory tools are therefore present on political party websites. However, few dialogic features are actually implemented. Mainly because political actors do not respond to users' comments or demands and when they choose to answer, it is always via private e-mail. This means that despite the *intuitiveness* of the interface, the *dialogic loop* is rarely achieved, which may lead to a limitation in the *conservation of visitors* and above all, block any type of relationship building.

The online relationship building efforts of Portuguese political parties' websites also do not seem to align with Ledingham and Bruning's (1998) dimensions of trust, openness, involvement, commitment and investment.

By giving users access to participatory tools, political parties are apparently communicating *trust* and fostering *openness* to their publics. By allowing one opinion to be posted on the website, for example, they demonstrate *involvement* in furthering users' interests. However, using the Internet means also being willing to stay open to interactions. And openness also means losing some control of the message and conversation. Well, this is exactly what the political communication managers choose not to embrace when they recommend not answering comments or questions via the website or Facebook. It is true that in recent times Portuguese political parties have been *investing* time, staff, and financial resources into building attractive and updated websites. But if they do not really interact, are political parties really *committed* to maintaining online relationships with citizens?

Bruning (2002) noted that organizations and publics have assumptions about how they expect to be communicated with, and online technology, in particular, can influence these expectations. Simply put: if there is a space on one website to "talk with us", then people expect to enter into a dialogue, not a monologue. This study also demonstrated that dialogue, when it does take place, is not between the party and commenters, but among the commenters themselves – usually between those who defend and those who attack the party's position. Horizontal communication has been considered important to foster civic participation (Dahlgren, 2005), but hardly, it could be argued, contributes to accomplishing political public relations objectives: influencing, establishing, building and maintaining beneficial relationships with publics.

Because political parties depend on citizens, and citizens on politics, one could argue that it would be very important to include dialogic features on websites and, mostly, to use their potentialities. This raises the question of whether websites and web-based communication have been overestimated as a relationship management tool in political public relations despite considerable attention from theorists. Moreover, it seems important to question if this gap could be reduced with a more political public relations perspective in the professionalization of the political communication field. Public relations practitioners could help political parties to develop a strategy for relationship building on digital platforms that embraces the potential for interaction and dialogue.

To finish, two ideas regarding future research. Although this study focuses on the political parties' perspective regarding relationship management via websites and web-based communication, future studies should include a component on how they are received by the public. The

public's expectations regarding the use of political websites could give important insights into how political public relations should manage political party-citizen online relationships and – by extension – foster political participation.

This study demonstrated that the opposition party (PS) is the one that includes the largest variety of participatory tools and that the website with the lowest level of participatory resources and interactions belongs to the governing party (PSD). Another suggestion for future research could be comparing government-citizen relationship management strategies with political party-citizen relationship management strategies. Such studies could be worthy of analysis, not only in national contexts but also in a broader and more comparative framework.

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THE PR PYRAMID AS MODEL FOR MANAGING ORGANIZATIONAL SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE?

Abstract

This paper explores social media as a new tool for Public Relations and also the implications of having a social media presence for organizations, confronting a literature review with empirical findings on emergent practices in organizations and exploring more particularly an example of best practices. Departing from the agreement shared by Public Relations academics and professionals on a profound shift in Public Relations as a consequence social media use, this paper intends to clarify 1) whether social media are tools that redefine PR practices or a contextual factor that redefines the role of Public Relations within organizational communication; and 2) which are the implications for organizations of deciding to manage a social media presence based on an exploratory and trial-and-error logic, vis-à-vis the implementation of concrete strategies.

The paper presents an exploratory study that identifies a relevant case study: TAP Portugal, the Portuguese airline company. This organization is present on different social media and found its own strategy for successfully managing such presence. Based on this example, we propose a model for managing organizational social media presence – the PR Pyramid – that articulates a combined structure involving Public Relations, Marketing and Customer Care. In times of crises, the Public Relations assume a pivotal role as the orchestrator of integrated communication.

Keywords: public relations; social media; organizational communication; integrated communication; crisis communication

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

SOCIAL MEDIA AS PR TOOLS OR CONTEXT FOR PR PRACTICES

Digital technologies have become pervasive and ubiquitous in contemporary daily life. Social media in particular have been exponentially growing both in users and diversity in increasingly shorter periods. In addition, social media, which were primarily devoted to communication and sharing within one's personal networks of relationships, are currently also *locus* of professional interactions.

Addressing the social changes related to the integration of social media in daily life needs to be contextualized in the more profound discussion about the relationship between technological development and social change, which can be summarized in three main perspectives (e.g. Ihde, 1990; Fuglsang, 2001): a) technological determinism, that claims that technological features and affordances shape use practices, thus having strong social impact; b) social constructivism, arguing that, on the contrary, users appropriate technologies and put them to use in function of their needs, goals or desires; and c) interactionism, that tries to synthesize the previous opposite views by considering that use practices and consequences result from a dynamic and ongoing mutual shaping between technology and human agency. Other contributions for addressing this phenomenon come from sociology: macro-sociological theories such as Gidden's structuration theory (1991), Bauman's liquefaction concept (2000) and Castells' network society theory (2005) understand social change as a result of the interaction between digital technologies and users.

Within Public Relations, most authors have been more focused on the particular and concrete changes that the social media as alternative or complementary communication tools have introduced in the daily practices and tasks of the PR professional. Literature abounds on specific strategies and practices for concrete social media such as the most used Facebook (e.g. Levy, 2010; CIPR, 2012) and also Twitter (e.g. Israel, 2009; Micek, Micek & Whitlock, 2009) or YouTube (e.g. Evans, 2010; Scott, 2010). Other contributions approach social media in general but are equally focused on their conceptualization as tools whose specificities require whether adaptations of the most common PR practices such as press releases, media kits or publicizing, whether brand new practices such as 24/7/365 availability or mastering editing and publishing software (e.g. Bratton & Evans, 2008; Hay, 2009; Brogan, 2010; Halligan & Shah, 2010; Wilcox & Cameron, 2010). Somerville, Gilham & Wood (2007) add that

PR practitioners tend to feel powerless in what regards social media in the sense that they are forced to adjust their professional practices in order to adapt to the technological requirements of these fast changing media, and also to the practices and preferences of their users. In fact, the concepts of public and of stakeholder are also changing, as digital users tend to be more active and more demanding in what concerns their communication with organizations (e.g. Tapscott & Williams, 2006; Castells, 2009).

Contiguous scientific fields such as Marketing, Organizational Communication and Organizational Theory present broader perspectives on the effects of social media on communication, organizations and society in general. More recently, these broader approaches can also be found among public relations' academics. The main consequences of the proliferation of social media identified within these broader approaches are the increasing complexity of organizations themselves and their context (e.g. Davis, 2009; Cornelissen, 2011), as well as the blurring of boundaries between the organizations and their exterior (e.g. Miller, 2009; Cheney, Christensen, Zorn & Ganesh, 2011). Davis (2009) highlights the increase of information circulating in digital networks, resulting in organizations having to struggle to get their stakeholders' attention in an environment cluttered with messages and stimuli. The possibilities of empowerment that social media provide to their users, who are becoming *prosumers* (Castells, 2005; Tapscott & Williams, 2006) or producers (Bruns, 2008) able to mass self-communicate their own contents (Castells, 2009), are one side of the coin, meaning that the other side is a severe loss of control of the organizations over their communications. This loss of control is considered by many scholars and practitioners as the main problem that social media poses to organizations and to PR professionals in particular (e.g. Postman, 2008; Scott, 2010).

This argument is the main grounding for authors who, following Grunig & Hunt (1984), relate social media and a change from the traditional asymmetric models of public relations to more symmetric practices and models (e.g. Kunsch, 2003; Solis & Breckenridge, 2009; Scott, 2010; Macnamara & Zerfass, 2012). Although the Public Relations practices of many organizations still rely on asymmetric and linear communication models and processes such as creating and publicizing information (e.g. press releases, press conferences, advertising campaigns, sponsored actions), without considering feedback or the relevance of this information to its publics, and these asymmetric communication models are appealing to organizations because they seem to enable them to control the messages publicized through the mass communication media (i.e. press, radio

and television), they are no longer suitable to emergent communication practices enabled by interactivity of social media. Thus, the changes in power balance between organizations and their publics are in fact brought about by the nature of online communication itself, which is horizontal, immediate, interactive, participative and engaging (Kelleher, 2009).

This change is affecting all sorts of organizational publics and even creating new publics and influencers. For instance, journalists question more the accuracy of press releases, and the internet and social media provide them the tools to thoroughly scrutinize the information publicized by the organizations. The linear model of communication invites communication and PR agencies to publicize press releases to the mass media without pondering if the information they are sending is relevant to them. According to a survey conducted in 2008 by Brazilian journalists for the association *Mega Brasil Communication* and *Comunique-se* website (a news website dedicated to media professionals) (Rossi & Azevedo, 2008) the vast majority of journalists think that the press releases that reach them: have little relevant information; are misspelled; are too long; and sound like they were written by lawyers. The most important new organizational public is consumers. Traditionally, direct communication with consumers was within the scope of Marketing, but consumers are increasingly engaging in non-promotional communication with organizations, such as corporate communication, recommendations and customer care. As these types of communication affect reputation, they are often managed by Public Relations. Another example of an emerging digital public is bloggers and reviewers, a new type of influencers in whom consumers trust more than in direct communication with organizations (Qualman, 2009).

Facing these changes, organizations have realized that they must change. Organizational communication is no longer linear and top-down but it requires more participatory and enabling communicative flows. This change in mind-set encompasses not only communication with the mass media, but also with other media and with internal stakeholders. Thus, the technological characteristics of social media as tools and their increasing pervasiveness and ubiquity as contextual features of our daily lives require more symmetry in Public Relations and Organizational Communication in general. However, others (Edwards & Hodges, 2011) point to the fact that organizations are collecting massive amounts of information about their clients (and other stakeholders) through social media – the so called big data – thus arguing that this should be taken into account when considering the power balance between organizations and clients. The more particularized

approaches (e.g. Breakenridge, 2012; Theaker & Yaxley, 2012) focused on the adaptations required in Public Relations practices and also on the emergence of new practices, both according to social media technological features and usage patterns, which although apparently innovative, do not represent a paradigmatic change in the nature of Public Relations.

Miller (2009), arguing that Public Relations are assuming a preponderant role in organizational communication due to the fact that social media are related to more frequent communication crises (Coombs, 2012), is no longer focused solely on Public Relations themselves but on their relationship with other types of organizational communication. Cornelissen (2009) also suggests that the blurring of boundaries between organizations and stakeholders results in the same blurring between Marketing, Public Relations and Internal Communication, contributing to the widening of functions of each and also the overlapping among them. These observations are the departure point to a reflection on the changes in the nature of public relations, besides its concrete professional practices, brought about by social media.

Broader approaches that conceptualize social media not as tools but as contextual and structuring features of contemporary society offer more grounding to the notion that Public Relations are undergoing a paradigmatic change, both as a professional area and as an academic field. Li and Bernoff (2008) suggest the term 'groundswell' to describe the exponential growth of both the number of users and the scope and depth of effects of the social media. Also, Qualman (2009) highlights that social media are not a fad, and therefore it is unavoidable for organizations to deal with social media as a structuring feature of their environment and of themselves. Tapscott and Williams (2010) claim that we are living in a macrowikinomics, as the effects of social media are felt not only in economy but in all spheres of society.

Concerning Organizational Communication, several authors emphasize the need for greater coherence and consistency in communications, required by the increasingly information-cluttered environment and by the multiplicity and complexity of the communication channels available for organizations, including social media. The concept of Integrated Communication has been suggested to describe the coordination and articulations between traditionally different organizational departments and/or functions, such as Marketing, Communication and Public Relations, which often communicate the same issues (or different aspects of the same issues) and share the same targets. This increasing need for consistency is grounded on the assumption that multiple and diversified yet coherent ways

of communicating will result in a more consolidated organizational image and reputation.

Cheney et al. (2011) describe integrated communication as follows:

(...)‘integrated communication’ is the notion that organizations, in order to establish their presence and legitimacy in the marketplace, must communicate *consistently* across different audiences and different media. By coordinating and aligning all messages from the organization (including visions, strategies, and identity themes), organizations pursuing integrated communication hope to create a unified impression of what the organization is and what it stands for. (Cheney et al., 2011, p. 126).

Kunsch (2003) argues that a new organizational communication mix is needed in order to incorporate, in an integrated manner, new communication tools and practices. The author highlights the role of Public Relations in Organizational Communication arguing that this new communication mix should be strategically integrated and interactive although centred in Public Relations in order to promote mutual benefits for the organization, its different stakeholders, the public opinion and the society in general. Kunsch describes Integrated Communication as a “ philosophy that drives the convergence of different areas and enables synergetic action” (Kunsch, 2003, p. 150), adding that “corporate communication, marketing, public relations and internal communication are joined in an organizational communication mix” (Kunsch, 2003, p. 150).

Breakenridge’s (2008) concept of PR 2.0, although apparently focused on the impact of the technological features of social media on Public Relations practices, is presented as a shift in the mind-set of the PR professional rather than in the professional practices. In addition, this shift in mind-set is precisely from an asymmetric relationship with the stakeholders to a more symmetric interaction, from publicizing to conversation.

Having confronted these two perspectives present in the literature – one more focused on technological features and PR practices, the other more focused on contextual factors and PR conceptualization – our empirical study aims to identify which of them is more often found among Portuguese organizations present in social media.

PR FUNCTIONS IN SOCIAL MEDIA

The early work on social media and Organizational Communication reports on an initial exploratory approach by organizations, whose main

drivers of adoption were mimicking the competition, trying to communicate with clients with the tools they were already using, and a general sense of 'not lagging behind' (e.g. Li & Bernoff, 2008; Postman, 2008; Qualman, 2009). This exploratory approach followed, in most cases, a trial-and-error logic, and was not based on a full comprehension of the technological features, use patterns and implications of social media.

At this stage, several authors suggested different uses for social media and inherent benefits both for organizations and customers. Tapscott and Williams (2008) highlight collaboration, regarding customers and potential customers as an unexplored resource for organizations that could be applied to innovation, promotion and even labour. Thus, social media are considered the ideal tool for crowdsourcing. Another perspective is presented by Li and Bernoff (2008) and Qualman (2009) both arguing that the main use of social media is for Marketing. These authors emphasize the potential of social media for promotion, branding and reputation. Qualman (2009) talks about a shift from word-of-mouth to world-of-mouth, referring to the exponential ability of viral spreading of information on social media. The author adds that the return on investment for social media remains active for over five years when directed to brand reputation. Branding and reputation management are also referred by Newlin (2009), who suggests the concept of 'passion brand' to describe the state of becoming a fan of a brand. When a customer has become fan of a brand, it means that he will not only promote and recommend it, but also try to 'evangelize' others into buying it and becoming fans themselves. In addition, social media are also effective tools for relational marketing, mainly for building social capital and for enhancing the durability of relationships (customer loyalty), as their technological features propitiate proximity and engagement (Postman, 2008; Qualman, 2009). Qualman (2009) even argues that, after building an engaging and consolidated relationship with customers and potential customers, social media are effective tools for selling.

Concerning Public Relations in particular, social media are often associated with the emergence of new influencers besides journalists and celebrities, such as bloggers and highly participative people with big and diversified social networks (e.g. Gillin, 2007; Breakenridge, 2008; Hunt, 2009). Reputation management is also referred by several authors whom highlight the loss of control of Public Relations over their messages and the need to evolve from an asymmetrical communication model grounded on broadcasting to a dialogue based on personalization (e.g. Scott, 2010; Theaker & Yaxley, 2012; Breakenridge, 2012). Due to this control loss, social

media are also often associated to communication crises, both as the locus of the crises and as the appropriate tool to respond and manage it (Coombs, 2012). The arrival of new digital technologies brought about constant access to a great amount of information, simultaneously, anywhere in the world. This has advantages and disadvantages when it comes to managing a crisis. The biggest drawbacks are the ability to multiply a simple fact, to turn it into an event of unprecedented notoriety. Moreover, there are many problems that are the product of rumours circulating the internet through forums, mailing lists, virtual communities or social networks. Among the advantages, we can highlight the ability to maintain a crisis management telematics through dedicated access nodes globally, in which updates about the course of events are available to leaders in real time and it is possible to follow what is published subsequently, as well as the ability to distribute information immediately. As a consequence, journalists are increasingly turning to the companies' web pages when seeking information (Orduna, 2004). It should be noted that organizations need to be alert to the development and evolution of new technologies of information and communication when it comes to communication crises management. Managing organizational crises 20 years ago was, in a sense, a simple, cheap and slow task. Today, the various forms of communicating online go beyond a simple space and time, creating more frequent communication crises with potential for viral spreading (Andrade, 2009).

Besides identifying particular practices that are changing or emerging, some authors present a strategic approach to social media. Among the earliest suggestions is Postman's (2008) insight on the relevance of having a social media strategy being equivalent to having a MS Word strategy, thus claiming that social media are merely communication tools and that their use should follow the general communication strategy of the organization. The most recent work on the issue, although recognizing the specificities of social media, agree on the need of an integrated communication strategy that encompasses not only the social media and public relations but all communication tools and communicational practices of the organization (e.g. Kunsch, 2003; Cornelissen, 2011; Cheney et al., 2011).

Thus, the empirical study also intends to find out which of these approaches is being adopted in Portuguese organizations regarding social media – exploratory and trial-and-error or integrated with the overall communication strategy – and which specific communication types and outcomes are more commonly being found by organizations through their social media presence.

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

This empirical research intends to contribute to the analysis and understanding of the issues discussed above, namely: 1) determining if Portuguese organizations are dealing with social media within a technology-focused perspective or according to a broader conception of social media as a contextual factor; and 2) identifying the communicational types and functions performed in social media and determining if they vary whether they result from an exploratory and trial-and-error approach or from a strategic approach.

This research project is characterized by a longitudinal nature, accompanying the adoption and use of social media by Portuguese big organizations since the beginning of 2011. The research design encompasses an initial exploratory phase and a posterior phase of deeper explorations of the relevant preliminary results. This design includes different methods, both quantitative and qualitative, according to the goals and requirements of each phase.

The exploratory phase studies a sample of 15 Portuguese organizations present in social media, selected among members of the Portuguese Association of Organizational Communication (APCE). The criteria for selection were: 1) being present on at least one social platform (back in 2011); and 2) having the highest amount of followers. Relevant agents of each organization were interviewed in order to get more information and re-define the questions to be addressed on the second phase of the research. Interviewees were senior level Public Relations, Communication and Marketing professionals (depending on who was responsible for managing social media presence), and they were asked their opinion on the general impact of social media and their particular effects for organizations and Public Relations. They were also questioned about their organizations' presence in social media and the way they manage it, as well as about their assessment of social media as PR tools. Each interview consisted of 12 predetermined questions. Most interviews were performed face-to-face, with the exception of two who expressed preference for answering via email. The face-to-face interviews were semi-structured, following the 12-question script but also offering relative freedom of expression and reasoning apart from the questions themselves. The interviews took place between May and July 2011. All interviews were transcribed and organized in analysis tables

according to the main issues discussed. The main categories created were the following: 1) social impact of social media; 2) effects of social media for organizations; 3) effects of social media for public relations; 4) presence in social media; 5) use and management of social media; and 6) assessment of social media as PR tools.

Subsequently to this exploratory phase, a relevant case study was selected for further exploration: TAP Portugal, the Portuguese airline company. The criteria underlying this selection were the following: a) it is one of the organizations which has been present in social media for a longer time (since 2009); b) the organization is present in different social media (e.g. YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, LinkedIn, and also has a mobile app); and c) the presence of this organization in social media and its management has been considered successful by the organization itself and several stakeholders such as clients, investors, mass communication media and social media experts (e.g. it has consecutively been considered the Portuguese 'most socially devoted brand' on Facebook by Socialbakers since 2012 and was awarded the same title on Instagram in 2014). Following Yin's (2003) guidelines on case studies, a longitudinal approach was adopted, combining quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative study consists on the content analysis of TAP's Facebook fan page, being Facebook the social media where the presence of this organization is stronger. The *corpus* of the content analysis was TAP's Facebook fan page, accessed once a day from August 2nd to September 2nd 2012. The categories analysed were: 1) number of likes; 2) information content; 3) promotional content; 4) responses to comments; and 5) time to respond to comments. The qualitative study encompassed interviews to three relevant agents identified: the heads of the public relations, marketing and client support departments, also with a longitudinal character as the same interlocutors were also interviewed in two different moments in time. The first two were interviewed twice, in October 2011 and in July 2012, and the latter was only interviewed once, in July 2012. The first interview consisted on a repetition of the script applied in the exploratory study, and the second interview was more focused on TAP's strategies and practices concerning social media. The second interview followed a script of 10 predetermined questions, but also following a semi-structured flow. All the interviews were conducted face-to-face and, as the previous ones, transcribed and organized in analysis tables according to the main issues discussed. The main categories created for the second interview were: 1) TAP's presence in social media; 2) TAP's management of social media; 3)

evolution since October 2011; 4) crisis situations; and 5) the role of public relations concerning social media and the organization.

RESULTS

STAGE 1: EXPLORATORY APPROACH TO SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE OF PORTUGUESE ORGANIZATIONS

This stage aimed to answer the following questions concerning the social media presence management by Portuguese organizations: 1) do social media ‘managers’ view professional practices as a consequence of technological requirements and features of social media, or instead as a contextual trend?; and 2) do social media ‘managers’ address this task based on an exploratory and trial-and-error logic, or do they have a concrete and specific strategy? In addition, we took the opportunity to more generally explore their take on how the social media are changing Public Relations and Organizational Communication.

The 15 organizations selected are the ones, among the APCE associates, with most fans on Facebook, which is the most important social medium in Portugal (96% of internet users, which are 62% of the Portuguese population, have an active Facebook account). Some of the organizations are present in other social media, being the most common YouTube, Instagram and Twitter, but they do not invest so much time, effort and resources as they do on Facebook.

Table 1 is a summarized analysis grid (Guerra, 2006) presenting the thematic categories identified, the main findings for each one, and representative quotes from the participants.

In sum, most of the interviewed professionals focus on social media as concrete tools, and feel somewhat overwhelmed by their complexity and by the challenges that they pose. However, almost half of them have a more general view of the phenomenon, considering this new way for organizations to communicate with their publics – more interactive and close – as a lasting trend. Concerning their approach to managing social media presence, only a minority claims having a well-thought strategy, and in most cases it is specific for social media. In two of the cases, the social media presence is managed by communication agencies specialized in digital, different from the agencies that work other media. Only one of the interviewees refers the need for social media strategy to be coherent with the overall business strategy of the organization. Looking at these results with our theoretical framework in

mind, we would argue that the more exploratory and trial-and-error approach is characteristic of an earlier stage of social media presence, while a more structured strategy, preferably integrated with the overall strategy, enables organizations to get more benefits from their social media presence.

THEMATIC CATEGORIES	MAIN FINDINGS	EXAMPLE QUOTES
SOCIAL IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA	- Most interviewees agree that digital technologies in general, and social media in particular, are changing the way we live, and in doing so have profound implications for Organizational Communication.	<i>"Life will never be the same because of digital technologies."</i>
	- Four interviewees emphasized the increasing importance of mobile devices as opportunities for organizations to develop new ways of communicating.	<i>"Mobile devices will be even more important than social media. Its the only channel with 24/7 exposure and with enormous personalization potential."</i>
	- Two interviewees considered Facebook specifically a fad, predicting its decline and subsequent emergence of other platforms for organizations to communicate with their publics.	<i>"Facebook will come and go as has happened to other platforms. Tomorrow we may very well be communicating with our publics in completely different ways."</i>
EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR ORGANIZATIONS	- Most interviewees refer that corporate reputation is more exposed	<i>"People are merciless on social media. They can say what they want about a brand, true or false."</i>
	- Most interviewees refer that the consumer has changed profoundly, becoming more active and demanding, but also that organizations have better tools to understand their behavior and influence them	<i>"Contemporary consumers are completely different. They know what they want and how to get it. And organizations see themselves forced to attend their every wish, otherwise competitors will."</i>
	- Some interviewees highlight that eCommerce is still underexplored	<i>"Social media are still in a very early stage. People tend to be more rational purchasing online. But social media have a great potential to explore impulse shopping."</i>
	- Some interviewees refer the need to think about new ways of advertising	<i>"Internet users hate advertising. And they know how to avoid it. So marketers need new ways of advertising."</i>

THEMATIC CATEGORIES	MAIN FINDINGS	EXAMPLE QUOTES
EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS	- Most interviewees refer a change from disseminating information to dialogue	<i>"We have always done clipping and follow ups, but now we have immediate feedback to consider."</i>
	- Most interviewees refer that organizational reputation is more exposed on social media, and fear crises	<i>"Social media can be extremely dangerous. If there is one thing that I fear is a communication crisis on Facebook."</i>
	- Some interviewees refer the emergence of new publics, such as bloggers	<i>"Bloggers and journalists cannot be treated in the same way. Bloggers don't have a code of ethics, so you have more margin to act."</i>
	- Some interviewees talk about the profession becoming more demanding, being 24/7 on call and having to learn how to create and publish digital content	<i>"As if PRs didn't have enough work already, now we have to created and edit pictures, videos, you name it. And we are kind of the firefighter of the organization. We have to be always on duty."</i>
PRESENCE IN SOCIAL MEDIA	- Most interviewees manage their organization's social media presence based on intuition and experimentation	<i>"Nobody really knows how that thing [Facebook] really works. It's so unpredictable and fast-changing. So the best thing to do is go with the flow."</i>
	- Only three interviewees claim having a specific strategy for social media, one of them saying that it is integrated in the overall strategy	<i>"We have a concrete strategy for social media. We use it to reinforce the emotional connection to our brand."</i>
	- Four interviewees claim they decided to be on Facebook because they wanted to reach the publics on the media they were already using	<i>"You need to get people's attention where they are. There are so many messages, people are not going to look for you."</i>
	- Most of the interviewees decided to create a Facebook Page in order to follow a general trend and/or not to lag behind competitors	<i>"We decided to create a Facebook page because all our main competitors were already on Facebook. We didn't want to 'lose the wagon'."</i>
	- Most interviewees post both corporate and promotional content, while some of the interviewees publish only promotional content	<i>"We post content related to our brand and also to specific products. And we post things that people like to share, quotes and stuff, funny pictures..."</i>
USE AND MANAGEMENT OF SOCIAL MEDIA	- Some of the interviewees do customer care through Facebook	<i>"We answer all the questions. Sometimes we ask people to continue the conversation by private messaging."</i>
	- Most interviewees stress the need of answering questions and requests	<i>"If you don't answer a question fast enough, you'll have ten times more complaints and criticism to deal with later."</i>
	- Interviewees have different opinions for dealing with negative posts from fans, ranging from deleting them to complete transparency	<i>"We don't delete fan content, but when a comment is really bad, we ask collaborators and friends to comment, so that the bad one disappears upper in the feed."</i>

THEMATIC CATEGORIES	MAIN FINDINGS	EXAMPLE QUOTES
ASSESSMENT OF SOCIAL MEDIA AS PR TOOLS	- Most interviewees are more concerned with the dangers posed by social media than with the advantages they also recognize	<i>"Social media are useful for getting awareness and for building reputation. But one second can ruin everything you worked for during months."</i>
	- Social media are portrayed, in general, as indispensable tools, but also as demanding ones	<i>"Its impossible not to be on social media nowadays, but it comes with a lot of effort. You have to monitor everything that is going on all the time."</i>

Table 1: Summarized analysis grid of interviews to social media 'managers

STAGE 2: TAP PORTUGAL AS A BEST PRACTICES CASE STUDY

Among all the organizations from our sample, TAP Portugal stood out as the one with more fans on Facebook, present in more social media, and with higher engagement with fans (actually, most of the Facebook pages were still following a logic of dissemination, publishing content, while TAP answers every question and complaint, thus proving customer care via Facebook, and also creates conversations and fosters participation. In order to draw from TAP's example guidelines for managing organizational presence on social media, the second stage of our research aimed to: 1) identify the main PR functions performed by TAP on Facebook (thought content analysis of TAP's Facebook page); 2) understanding TAP's strategy for managing its social media presence (through interviews to relevant agents); and 3) identify relevant guidelines for managing social media presence that can generally be applied to other organizations.

Concerning the content analysis, our results show the main functions that TAP conducts through its Facebook page, as well as the different types of communication present and the varied strategies followed by the organization to engage with clients and deal with crises. We found a high frequency of publications on TAP's Facebook page, namely an average of two publications per day (including Saturdays and Sundays). These publications are a combination of information, photos Desk (TAP destinations) and promotions, thus revealing that the main uses of TAP's Facebook fan page are for marketing, branding and relationship building. Most fans tend to be active, attributing 'likes' to several publications and commenting. On our first day of content analysis, TAP's Facebook fan page counted 4.206 fans, as Figure 1 shows.



Figure 1: Number of 'likes' on the first day of empirical data collecting

Figure 2 highlights TAP's effort to articulate its presence in different social media, referring on its Facebook fan page to its 7.747 Twitter followers (most from Brazil).



Figure 2: Example of publication that tries to articulate the presence in different social media (Facebook and Twitter)

The actions that caused more engagement were games. Figures 3 and 4 present TAP's game "Test TAP's History", occurring from August 6th to 10th, which counted 1105 participants on the Facebook page and significantly increased the number of page likes.



Figure 3: Game organized by TAP on its Facebook page



Figure 4: Publication with the game results

Finally, we highlight strategies used to gain more followers, posting in English (thus appealing to foreigners) and emphasizing the presence of Portuguese celebrities on occasions like the Olympics or Euro to publicize the brand on Facebook. Figure 5 is an example featuring Cristiano Ronaldo.

However, we also found evidence of crisis communication and reputation management, although much less frequent. Concerning comments, we point out as an example the photograph of one of its airplanes published by TAP on August 24th. This publication resulted in a large number of comments about the aircraft itself and a comment about flight delays, to which TAP answered as Figure 6 shows. Preventing a possible attack to its reputation, TAP answered in 15 minutes.



Figure 5: Publication with celebrity endorsement on Facebook featuring soccer player Cristiano Ronaldo

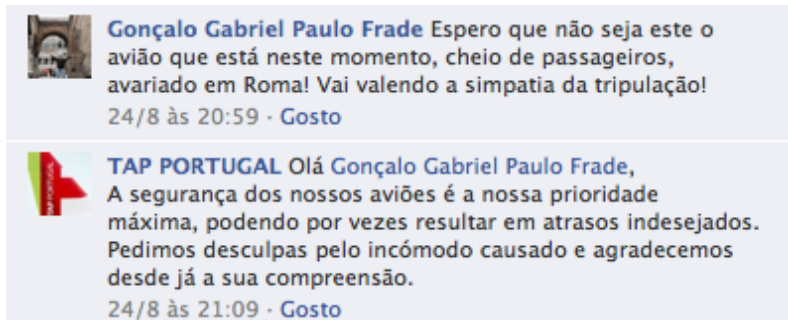


Figure 6: TAP answering negative comments¹

Regarding communication crisis shows a statement about an upcoming strike presented on July 4th. There were 71 comments about the publication and 332 likes.



Figure 7: Example of crisis communication²

In what concerns the interviews, the interviewees were André Serpa Soares, head of the Public Relations Department, Gilda Granja Luís, head of the Marketing Department, and João Santos, head of the Customer Care

¹ Gonçalo Gabriel Paulo Frade: *I hope this is not the plane that is currently full of passengers, broken in Rome! At least the crew is friendly!*

TAP Portugal: *Hello Gonçalo Gabriel Paulo Frade. The safety of our planes is our top priority, and can sometimes result in unwanted delays. We apologize for any inconvenience caused and thank you for your understanding.* (Author's translation)

² Strike announced by pilots' union was cancelled. The strike which was scheduled between July 5th and 8th and August 1st and 5th was cancelled by the Pilots' Union. Following the cancellation this strike, all TAP operations will be normalized. (Author's translation)

Department. Regarding the first interview, consistently with the results from the exploratory phase, all the interviewees agreed that social media have a profound social impact in all social spheres. About the effects of social media for organizations, Gilda Granja Luís referred to the importance of engaging with clients in social media, offering them value-added benefits in comparison to other points of contact. Specifically on Public Relations, André Serpa Soares highlighted the loss of control of the PR professionals in social media conversations, but argued that the way of regaining part of this inevitably lost control is engaging in conversations with stakeholders via social media. João Santos argued that having 15 employees to answer questions submitted by Facebook users in 15 minutes is a plus for Customer Care, as well as for the entire organization.

About TAP's presence in social media, the first experience was in 2009, when a flashmob was performed on Portela airport to celebrate Christmas. This flashmob was later posted on YouTube by the TAP marketing department and soon became viral, as TAP had a more conservative image and the flashmob was perceived as completely unexpected. The video was viral for a while, watched by over 2 million on YouTube, and it contributed positively to reposition TAP as a younger and fresher brand (the video was actually part of a rebranding process started in 2005). Following this successful experience, TAP's marketing department decided to create a Facebook page. This page was often updated with promotions and product information, being mostly an alternative and complementary marketing channel, but it did not gather many fans or motivate frequent participation.

TAP's use of social media changed drastically in March 2010, during the eruption of Eyjafjallajökull volcano in Iceland, when most European companies were unable to fly to several destinations because of the spreading of volcanic ash. As TAP's call centre was clogged with calls asking for information on flights and delays, many clients turned to Facebook looking for answers to their questions. At the time, the Marketing Department, unable to respond, articulated a mixed team with the call centre to deal with this crisis, under the supervision of the Public Relations Department. This solution was a win-win situation, as clients were able to see their questions answered and the organization was able to answer several clients with the same question at the same time, in a simpler and less time-consuming way than via telephone.

Less than a year later, the second interview showed an evolution from the early TAP's trial-and-error approach to social media to a consolidated strategy. André Serpa Soares presented this idea as a pyramidal structure to

describe the management of TAP's social media presence. The contents in the page are autonomously introduced by a dynamic articulation of Marketing, Public Relations and Customer Care, considering that looking for specific information is the most frequent action performed by the Facebook fans in TAP's page (TAP's call centre now has a specific Facebook Team). However, Public Relations occupy the top of this pyramid, as the responsibility of answering the questions that the others are unable to answer falls under their management. Besides, whenever a crisis situation arises, Public Relations immediately gain control over all the contents posted, centralizing information and concentrating the decision making power in what concerns social media. This second interview also revealed a change of perspective concerning Public Relations and social media from a more tool-focused and trial-and-error approach to a broader perspective on the interdependencies between social media and organizations and a more strategic view of public relations' new pivotal role in organizational communication.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This paper shows the evolution from a tool-focused and trial-and-error approach to a contextual and strategic approach to social media on TAP's case study. It also highlights the consistency between a broader, more strategic and more integrated approach to social media that is being proposed by several authors (e.g. Kunsh, 2003; Breakenridge, 2008; Cheney et al., 2011) and the case study explored, which stands out for presenting an approach to social media that has brought concrete benefits for the organization, such as positive images and reputation, successfully dealing with communication crisis (such as the volcanic ash situation but also others as strikes and the possibility of privatization of the company), and a better management of time and calls in the call centre.

Considering the current context of economic crisis in Portugal, organizations have been focusing and taking maximum advantage of the online media at the expense of other existing means of communication, hoping that it will increase the visibility of the organization, improve the knowledge of customers without making large investments, prevent or answer to negative criticism from customers, and reduce the sales cycle. However, consistency among all communication channels is needed in order to achieve these goals. Concerning PR functions, this paper also shows that the shift in Public Relations resulting from social media use does not only affect concrete practices, but it has a more profound nature.

Drawing on TAP's case study as an example of best practices, we conclude by presenting a model for managing organizational presence on social media that can be applied to other organizations: the PR Pyramid. We named the model as such because it proposed the articulation between three different organizational functions/areas in order to successfully manage social media presence, and because Public Relations play a pivotal role in times of crisis. Our model is represented in Figure 8.

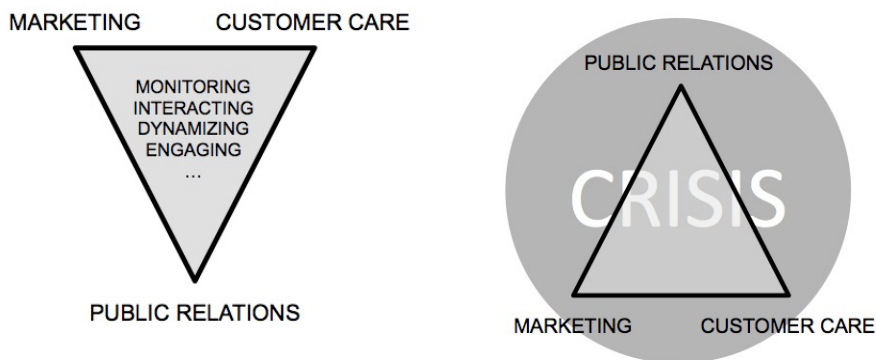


Figure 8: The PR Pyramid

We argue that the PR Pyramid is a relevant conceptual framework for fully comprehending the impact of social media on Organizational Communication, highlighting the preponderant role of Public Relations as its orchestrator and showing that Public Relations themselves are undergoing a profound change that goes beyond practices and techniques. As a consequence of the interactions between social media, organizations and stakeholders, Public Relations are emerging as more than one type of Organizational Communication, and assuming a crucial strategic role in assuring the articulation of all types of Organizational Communication, as well as the desired and required consistency, integration and coherence in a communication mix.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Concerning future work, we intend to follow two different lines of research. On the one hand, we are setting up an observatory of the use of social media by organizations in order to monitor the impact of social

media on organizations, communication and the market and also to identify case studies and promote benchmarking. This project is already in course but still at a very early stage. On the other hand, we also intend to further explore the concept of the PR Pyramid discussed in this paper. We aim to continue accompanying TAP's case, to find out whether similar solutions are being followed by other organizations, to further explore the potential of the PR Pyramid as a conceptual model, and also to test its correlation to the successful use and management of social media by organizations³.

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³. This paper was developed with the support of the Research Center for Communication and Culture from Universidade Católica Portuguesa, also with funding from Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT) - FCT PEst-OE/ELT/UI0126/2013.

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THE PARADOXICAL EMPOWERMENT OF CONSUMER-CITIZENS THROUGH ADVERTISING

Abstract

As the use of new media and the new uses of traditional media evolve in the contemporary everyday life, appeals to consumer participation in advertising appear to have seized the communication process of brands and organisations, thus evoking an empowering trend and suggesting, at least at the discourse level, a transfer of power from corporations to consumers and citizens.

This paper discusses the concept of empowerment through the participations of consumer-citizens in and through advertising, reflects critically on the nature, meaning and impact of this empowerment, arguing that it involves paradoxical processes and results and concludes by suggesting media literacy approaches to promote communicational power balance and sustainability.

Keywords: Empowerment, participation, advertising, citizenship

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary media ecology, powered by both technological innovation and new uses of media, invites and promotes consumer participation in advertising to unprecedented levels. Consumer's participation in advertising contests or as witnesses of a product's efficiency, through personal testimony, for example, is not a novelty in the advertising *modus operandi*. These strategic subterfuges have been used traditionally to convey credibility and involvement to advertising messages. Nevertheless, in the new media landscape, consumers and citizens are urged to take part not only as audience and target of the advertising communicational scheme, but also as producers of the messages, featuring in commercials, but also creating, directing and broadcasting them, often through viral

replication. This prospect of interactivity and pro-activity in the advertising communicational flow would suggest an effective empowerment of the consumer-citizen, being now able to make its own voice heard in the corporation owned media space or in the institutional public space, a stakeholder by its own right and relevance. In order to fully understand the nature and impact of this empowerment we need to observe the interactional performance of consumer and advertising protagonists and plunge deeper into the concept of empowerment itself.

EMPOWERMENT: THE POWER OF A CONCEPT

According to the British Dictionary, the noun “empowerment” stands for “the giving or delegation of power or authority; authorization; the giving of an ability; enablement or permission” meaning, as a transitive verb, “to give or delegate power or authority to; authorize; to give ability to; enable or permit”¹.

The word “empowerment” literally holds the concept of “power” at its core. Depending on the context, it indicates more specific meanings and involves generally different dimensions, namely, 1) transformation; 2) promotion; 3) capacitation and 4) self-awareness. The concept of empowerment involves the notion of transformation, assuming a degree of improvement, a change from one state to another, from one state of difficulty or impotence into a state of empowerment and possibility. Empowerment implies also the promotion of change, that is, the creation of favourable conditions for this change to occur. Empowerment means capacitation, by educational and technical upgrading, and a self-knowledge and awareness of that condition, by being able, being motivated to use the power provided by that capacitation and put it into action. Therefore the multiple meanings of the word produced extensive interpretations.

On one hand, the term empowerment encompasses a broader concept, associated with the grant or acquisition of power capacity associated with the promotion of influence and conditions to act, and in this sense is frequently used in the politics of development rationale, thus involving relevant economic and social dimensions. From a political point of view, for example, it refers to the improvement of the democratic condition:

(...) empowerment through the deepening of democracy
by expansion of political culture and citizen participation.

¹ <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/empowerment>, accessed in February 2015.

Empower here means conquest of time and voice, for individuals, organizations and communities, so that these have high levels of information, autonomy and ability to make their own cultural, political and economic choices. (Horochovski & Meirelles, 2007, p. 494)²

The influential dimension of empowerment relates to yet another meaning. In addition to giving authority or providing conditions, empowerment also refers to promote the affirmation or influence of individuals or social groups. In fact, empowerment is read as a process that develops the various levels of participation in the deliberation and decision-making — personal involvement, organisational development or community changes — through which a person or community “gives or gets power from another since power originates outside the person or community who gives or gets it from another” (Iqbal, 2007, p. 60). Empowerment is a phenomenon of transfer and reconfiguration of the balance of power and social influence

(...) the long process of transferring economic and social power from one to another and/or the creation of new centers of socio-economic power complementary to, or in competition with the traditional centers (...) shifting the balance of social power from one social class or group of classes to another, which may include the shift in economic or political importance between areas or regions, resulting in a new power configuration. (Iqbal, 2007, p. 61)

Another expression associated with empowerment is ‘agency’ referring to the ability, the capacity and the motivation to act, the actual capacity to produce action and thus change: “(...) the physical or mental ability, skill or capability that enables actors to do something. The actor is assumed to proceed under his or her own volition, or at least without the permission of another” (Arnould, 2007, p. 97). The agency notion is particularly relevant in situation of extreme conditions where a need to act is imposing. Some authors, like Jardine and Dridger (2013), debate the role of risk communication as an opportunity for empowerment in the sense that it should provide conditions for citizens to make informed decisions in face of danger or the perception of risk.

On the other hand, from an educational perspective, the term ‘empowerment’ is widely accepted as corresponding to the notion of training, indicating a transformation capacity by learning and upgrading

² Author’s translation from the Portuguese original text.

information and knowledge. Nevertheless, according to certain currents of education and philosophy, namely Paulo Freire's³ coinage of the term "empowerment", this transformation is not merely activated from the outside, but must correspond to an inner conquest of power, thus involving a dimension of self-awareness and self-fulfilment (Valoura, 2006, n/p). Furthermore is relevant to underline that the connection between empowerment and self-awareness is not strictly interior to the individual, it also relates to the awareness of himself and of his power and place in society, as a citizen, as part of a community, frequently triggered by the identification of injustices or inequalities, that is, the manifestation of an imbalance of power either inside an organisation, at work, for example, or in the society at large and concurrently in the media sphere.

At the extent to which empowerment specifically relates with the interaction between consumer and advertising, although there is a general understanding of the expression, consumer empowerment is frequently used but not consistently defined. Nevertheless some efforts to enlighten the concept have been made. Shibly et al. (2015) consider three main dimensions: psychological, the individual ability or its perception to produced desired changes, in the sense of becoming able or being allowed to produce those changes or have more control over their environment; economic, concerning namely the consumer buying power, referred by marketing gurus (Porter, 1980) as "consumer bargaining power", the ability to force prices down, highlight quality, improve services or the management view of empowering employees to produce costumer satisfaction; and the social dimension, assuming that there is an inter relational dependency between individual and groups in order to satisfy their mutual needs, "The power of an actor is a function of the other person's dependence on the actor. The greater the other person's dependence on the actor, the greater the actor power in the relationship (...)" (Shibly, 2015, p. 209). The latter perspective seems to illustrate the paradigm shift, reflecting the power imbalance and change, and the correspondent resistance forces towards that change.

THE DOUBLE COMPLICITY OF EMPOWERMENT AND PARTICIPATION

Empowerment thus represents the organized effort of disadvantaged groups to increase control over the resources and the institutional setting

³ Paulo Freire is a Brazilian philosopher and educator from the 60's, pioneer in literacy programs in the northeast of Brazil, author of 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' (1970), whose works associate education and development philosophy.

(Abbot, 1995), a sustained process whereby, through collective action and reflection, a community gains a greater understanding of its situation of powerlessness, while acquires confidence and assumes responsibility for its own development and resource management. According to this understanding, true empowerment is enabled by participation, the massive participation of the bases of an organisation as the core ingredient, “the key to articulating the aspirations and mobilizing people’s energies. Participation services a mechanism for mobilizing resources, labour, ideas, and motivation for promoting community welfare and development” (Iqbal, 2007, p. 59).

The association between empowerment and participation appears to be particularly relevant with regard to a qualification for participation *de facto* involving, in addition to the creation of technical, legal or social requisites to the empowerment, the ability to provide conditions for motivation and gratification for participation that make this participation compelling, relevant and useful, that is, effective. Referring to the empowerment processes inherent to the implementation of social programs and reforms, Amy Gutman and Dennis Thompson (1997) stress the distance between technical training and real participation:

The process of designing and implementing a policy of fair workfare cannot presuppose that welfare recipients are politically empowered. (...) Citizens who are poor participate in politics far less frequently than more affluent citizens. They also have fewer informal means of influencing public officials (...) poor don't vote and they don't fight back. (Gutmann & Thompson, 1997, pp. 303-305)

Participation and empowerment coexist, in fact, in a double complicity: being participation a form of empowerment and acting also as an empowering force, in order to gain voice and conquer a space of power, decision-making and qualification, through which the exercise of that power becomes effective.

THE INTERACTION BETWEEN ADVERTISING AND CONSUMER-CITIZENS

The advertising communicational process assumes an interaction with consumers as its main target and it involves a multitude of spheres and variables reaching from hard-core commercial strategies to product design, distribution layout, institutional communication and cultural behaviour and attitude environment. A significant number of these dimensions, if not all, have been affected in recent years with a paradigmatic change from a one to

many, linear direction, to a one-to-one, multiple networked communication flux, that presupposes more consumer participation in the process and, eventually, its empowerment (Melo, 2013).

These paradigm shifts pose a number of challenges to brands and corporations, both at the commercial and institutional level, namely on their capability to respond, forecast and manage the “feedback nightmare” — some organisations are having trouble to deal with the unpredictable proactivity of consumer and citizens, adopting either denial or panic behaviours that do not contribute to their reputation in a positive manner (Melo & Sousa, 2013). We would draw our attention to some other cases that specialised media took as resourceful material to demonstrate consumer and citizen global empowerment. The cases of GAP, the global fashion brand — whose rebranding efforts in 2010 lasted only a week, doomed at birth by a wide consumer’s protest and a demand for the old logo bursting a few hours short after the new logo was announced in the brand’s site (Walsh, 2010) — and Tropicana, the beverage from PepsiCo Inc. — whose 2009 rebranding lasted two months only and resulted in a sales loss of 20% — are good examples of the power balance change, reflecting consumer’s symbolic ownership of brands and their activism as stakeholders (Babej, 2011). Concurrently corporations recognize consumer empowerment as one of their management driving forces (Aaker & Meyers, 1994; Baskin, 2012) and are attentive to its upgraded power as the advertising line for a management book on customer service advertises: “In a world where a single tweet can torpedo your brand, you must empower your employees to solve the problems of empowered customers” (Bernoff & Schadler, 2010, p. 3).

Such examples configure what can be considered empowerment criteria, including access, capability, motivation, self-awareness and, eventually, consumer literacy. Combined in a perfect storm they provide ideal conditions for the activist consumer to be empowered into an accidental yet impactful citizen with the power to transform society through its action, resulting in a real, social and economic impact.

This consumer-citizen intervenes in the advertising process, and in the capitalist system as well, as a godlike actor much different from the “to buy or not to buy” traditional consumer (Jubas, 2007). The new consumer evolved from capitalism to consumerism (Ewen, 1976; Frank, 1997; Matellart, 1991; Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010), being more self-aware about the meaning of its actions and implications, exerting ethical and political consumption as a mantra. It has access to information and to technology, it has the power to create and co-create content, shaping media and advertising industry by

its audience choices (Jenkins, 2012); it has the power to destroy brands, boycott products, to built and damage reputations. Armed with multiple, powerful ammunition it acts, decides, influences by providing data and relevant insights (Gibson, 2012) — frequently from the very conception of a product (Melo, 2014) — and even advertises and recommends — see the case of fashion bloggers, for example — the products and brands that fit its values and needs (Klimmt & Hadler, 2011), thus featuring an immaterial control of marketing and the market itself.

As further reflection to a sociological dimension of this phenomenon we might advance the notion that this new power balance, or should we say imbalance, also puts forward the idea of social capital, as a structural element (Lesser, 2000). A form of accumulated wealth due to relationships, social capital can be understood as intangible relational network, different from other types of capital, but still impactful:

Whereas economic capital is in people's bank accounts and human capital is inside their heads, social capital inheres in the structure of their relationships. To possess social capital, a person must be related to others, and it is those others, not himself, who are the actual source of his or her advantage (...) the motivation of others to make resources available on concessionary terms is not uniform. At the broadest level, one may distinguish between consummatory versus instrumental motivations to do so. (Portes, 1998, p. 7)

The concept of social capital finds also a parallel with the dynamics of power control that we find useful to this line of thought, as Alexandro Portes (1998) associates it with the notions of “bounded solidarity”:

The social capital created by tight community networks is useful to parents, teachers, and police authorities as they seek to maintain discipline and promote compliance among those under their charge. Sources of this type of social capital are commonly found in bounded solidarity and enforceable trust, and its main result is to render formal or overt controls unnecessary. (Portes, 1998, p. 7)

Furthermore social capital conveys a form of duality both in its nature, in its implementation through social networks and as a result of its impact.

Notice that social capital, in the form of social control (...) effects are exactly the opposite of those commonly celebrated in the literature. Whereas bounded solidarity

and trust provide the sources for socioeconomic ascent and entrepreneurial development among some groups, among others they have exactly the opposite effect. Sociability cuts both ways. (Portes, 1998, p. 18)

This portrait reflects similar conditions to the ones observed in the interaction between consumer-citizens and advertising especially when it concerns active communities of consumers and the efforts of corporations to manage and control a fruitful relationship in the new media ecology, leading us to the next reflection on the paradoxical nature of this interaction.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE FLOW: PARADOXICAL EMPOWERMENT

The contemporary bidirectional and multiple networked flux of communication work also in multiple ways. Therefore, the “power to the people” motto, so well condensed in the Vodafone slogan “Power to You”, is not costless to the power balance and confrontation between consumers and advertisers. Notwithstanding this messianic discourse and the apparently more democratic and accessible advertising communicational structure, empowered consumer-citizens face still additional challenges.

Taking into account the idiosyncrasies of commercial and symbolic conditions emerging from the interaction of advertising with consumers is important to underline the dimension of power perception by opposition to real power. Consumer behaviour literature somehow coincides the perception of the freedom of choice as a perception of control over one’s environment, which particularly might for the digital environment of advertising and social networks communications and adds to the intricate complexity of the empowerment paradox. Although it can be argued that perception is not equivalent to reality, its impact has to be taken in consideration. As Shibly et al. (2015) put it, several authors draw attention to this entangled relation:

Consumer behaviour has associated the concept of power with that of perceived choice. Botti suggests perceived choice is one of the important types of control, and Hui and Bateson argue that any behavioural or emotional effects caused by the availability of choices can be considered as outcome of perceived control. In this context, control has been defined as the freedom of choosing an alternative from among a choice set, instead of being assigned to the same alternative by an external agent (i.e. other individuals or chance). Thus, providing a consumer with more choice is one of the principles of empowering consumer. (p. 260)

Nevertheless one might ethically question the authentic and genuine nature of this empowerment specially taking into consideration how the concept of choice, as a form of consumer participation in the market, serves a foundational drive for the whole marketing and advertising system (Willcox, 2015).

Participation has been traditionally used to legitimate power both in the media and through the media (Carpentier, 2011), being at the centre of the democratic theory. The advertising industry and corporations and brands follow a similar path, bearing in mind the efficiency and performance of the message, but also the power negotiation it conveys, persuading consumers to play the game — frequently willingly, we might add —, and turning consumer participation in a win-win situation that is at the essence of consumer culture (McAllister & Mazzarella, 2000; Turow & McAllister, 2009). It becomes clear that consumer participation in advertising serves untold and undercover corporative and institutional strategies on which advertising new trends are based upon. Behavioural marketing, search advertising, community building consumers, enthusiastic consumers who are hired to be brand counsellors, personalized advertising, even the possibility to freely choose advertising content, may be considered amongst them.

Paradoxically, by coping with brands, frequently unaware of it, in spite the standard cookies agreement they automatically click on without a second thought, consumers assume a price to pay for their entry in the club: the omnipresent hidden monitoring of their every move, choice, opinion and even intention. A whole research and planning industry neighbour to advertising and management is grounded on this source of relevant and valuable information, posing new or updated ethical questions both to practitioners and theorists (Chung et al., 2015; Jugenheimer et al.; Katz, 2014; Wells, 2014).

Therefore, the interactions between consumer-citizens and the advertising platforms configure what John Sinclair (2012) coined as the “empowerment-exploitation paradox” that could be translated to a simple principle: the more power you have as a consumer the more power you give back to the system in form of data and even accountable work as a *prosumer* (Melo, 2014). This paradoxical empowerment means that the more advertising space consumer-citizens conquer, the more advertising vehicles they become, a free source of precious insights, providing inputs and valuable tools for advertising strategic decisions of which they are frequently unaware of. Giving consumers the power to decide, to choose and to participate, advertising, whose main function is to promote

consumption in the capitalist system, envisages its legitimation and efficiency. Simultaneously, this creative industry enables, promotes and absorbs consumer's inputs as functional operative tools to the advertising process, configuring if nothing else an ambivalent empowerment.

FINAL NOTE, FURTHER CHALLENGES

As a consequence, this duality reflects the enduring advertising chameleonic nature with an even more pervasive update. Furthermore, it replicates grounds for traditional criticism on advertising (Alexander et al., 2011), mainly over its powerfulness, intrusiveness and its manipulative condition, posing further challenges to strategic creativity and to the consumer-citizen as an individual and as a self-aware community as well. The breakthrough over these circumstances, that may fit the metaphor of a never-ending loop of power negotiation, could only be reached by effective empowerment. More consumption awareness, educated consumerism both for consumers and advertisers, promoting ethics and advertising best practices and consistent media and advertising literacy rise in the horizon as resilient and promising paths to attain real empowerment. In the meantime, the empowerment paradox dominates the difficult and ever changing balance between brands, organisations, advertising and consumers and citizens.

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FROM AMATEUR TO EXPERT: PROFESSIONALIZATION IN THE FIELD OF INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Abstract

Professionalization in specialist disciplines like internal communication may lead scholars and practitioners working in a certain niche to question whether theoretical principles in the more established field of Public Relations are applicable to their specialization. In this paper we analysed whether different forms of knowledge transfer, as identified in the literature on professionalization, contribute to the creation of a professional identity. To this end we distributed an online survey amongst the members of a professional interest group.

We found that internal communicators do not all share the same educational background. Few have built their career on internal communication. Professionalization in this discipline mostly consists of peer contacts. A solid link between research and practice has not yet been established. Finally, we found that internal communicators are open to innovations in their field. This can speed up the process of professionalization and therefore the development of a unique social identity.

We made a contribution to the literature of both PR and internal communication by questioning the range to which PR theory can be applied to internal communication topics. We additionally inquired whether specialization in internal communication can be justified on theoretical grounds. Further research will determine whether professionalization of specialisms fragments the field of PR.

Keywords: Internal communication, professionalization, public relations, professional identity, specialization

INTRODUCTION

History teaches us that small radical minorities armed with a strong ideology often prevail against a large indifferent majority. Such is the state of Public Relations (PR) where all kinds of specialisms claim their unique character and strive to become recognized as independent professions. In this study we take the example of internal communication as an extreme case where an important group of scholars and professionals advocate in favour of the formal recognition of this niche within the broad domain of organizational communication.¹

We studied the existing literature on both PR and internal communication to understand how research in both domains has evolved. We found that PR still acts as an umbrella concept spanning most forms of strategic communication. However, some subdomains like internal communication stress their unique characteristics and gain in popularity. Unfortunately we witnessed that practitioners in this newly formed discipline seem to be asking the same questions that were addressed in PR research a long time ago.

From existing research we drew several parameters that could have played a role in the development of the idea that internal communication is different from PR. We decided to devote this paper to the study of professionalization as one of the potential drivers in this process. We, as well as many scholars before us, found the literature on professionalism and professionalization to be vast and confusing at times (Cullen, 1978; Freidson, 1994; Kanes, 2010). Nonetheless, we argue that this study offers a unique contribution to this body of literature by establishing a link between important forms of professionalization and the formation of a professional identity, which in turn is considered to be a necessary condition for the establishment of a community of practice (Goode, 1957; Larson, 1977; Wenger, 1998).

Additionally we found developments in the field of PR to be stagnating and therefore not able to accommodate progress made in specialist fields (C. Botan & Hazleton, 2006). The excellence theory developed by Grunig (J. E. Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2006; J. E. Grunig & IABC Research Foundation, 1992) has been valuable but seems inadequate to explain phenomena in a time of mass self-communication (Castells, 2011). Indeed, the introduction of social media raises questions as to what will happen if we continue to

¹ Particularly noteworthy in this respect is the work by Mary Welch and Kevin Ruck and the efforts by national as well as international professional interest groups like Melcrum and IoIC (Institute of Internal Communication) to establish internal communication as a field different from PR.

view internal communication as part of a set of strategic communication activities within a PR department (Ruck & Welch, 2012).

For this study we included all major phases that practitioners encounter in their professionalization trajectory. To this end we launched an online survey amongst the members of the Belgian Association for Internal Communication (BViC) whom we expect to be supporters of further professionalization and recognition of their specialization.² A total number of 85 valid questionnaires were returned and subsequently analysed with the statistical software package SPSS.

We found that most of our respondents are women in their mid-career with an educational background in languages or communication studies. Although language and communication studies figure prominently in our data we found internal communication practitioners to come from a wide spectrum of educational programs in the humanities or social sciences. This indicates that recruiters do not yet consider a background in communication as a necessary condition to take up a job as an internal communicator.

A second finding is that most internal communication practitioners do not have a track record in internal communication. It seems as if internal communication consists of a set of tasks that is assigned to someone who has started a career in human resources, marketing or some branch of organizational communication. However, we do need to add that the recognition of internal communication as an activity in need of full-time care is relatively recent and presumably linked to the professionalization of the discipline.

Third, we were able to confirm van Ruler's (2005) claim that scholars and academics do value different kinds of knowledge. Therefore, work on the optimization of knowledge transfer systems is needed to stimulate research-driven professionalism. A last finding is that internal communication practitioners do seem open to learn about new developments in their field. This is important if scholars seek to disseminate their research findings amongst practitioners.

Contrary to what we expected from the literature we found that most practitioners with internal communication activities are not in favour of having separate internal communication departments. This may be a reflection of the situation in existing organizations today. However, it may also be an indication that internal communicators do not yet have a strong professional identity. This opens up opportunities for PR scholars to adjust

² The survey was online from 10 April 2013 until 24 April 2013.

their theoretical premises and, as a result, reassert their dominant position in the field of organizational communication.

LITERATURE REVIEW

THE UNIQUE VALUE PROPOSITION OF INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Some argue that internal communication has its own unique value proposition while others consider it to be part of PR.³ In this paper we invite the reader to reflect deeper on this debate. First, we need to know what defines value. In most for-profit organizations “money” would be the most straightforward answer. One might argue that the situation is different in non-profit organizations. The question is whether non-profit organizations would care less about the cost-efficiency ratio of internal communication expenses. One thing is certain, although we would argue that internal communication happens all of the time in all parts of the organizations, expenditures in the area of internal communication are usually linked to the conviction that these expenses result in helping the organization to attain its goals, be them profit or non-profit in nature.

The idea behind spending money on internal communication is that it in some way contributes to the success of the organization. Indeed, when we look at internal communication as a tool to influence a certain situation in order to achieve a certain outcome we enter the domain of management communication or, to use another term, strategic communication (Zerfass & Huck, 2007). In traditional, some would say paternalistic, top-down management systems that can often be found in large enterprises the underlying rationale is seemingly straightforward. Expenses in the field of internal communication need to support management decisions. It is in this old management paradigm that the excellence theory by James and Larissa Grunig was developed (L. A. Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002).

PUBLIC RELATIONS AS THE UMBRELLA CONCEPT

Scholars like the Grunigs led the quest for excellence but the funding came from industry, the International Association for Business Communicators in particular. The excellence studies used ‘Public Relations’

³ Unfortunately, we did not yet find a systematic review of the literature on internal communication. However, we did notice that there are variations in the way scholars define the relationship between internal communication and PR.

as the umbrella concept to define all efforts in which communication is issued in order to achieve management goals. Two research questions guided the excellence study. First, scholars needed to answer the effectiveness question in order to discover the extent to which Public Relations increase organizational effectiveness. Second, the excellence question was asked in order to establish a prescriptive framework consisting of conditions linked to the ultimate goal of achieving excellence (C. Botan & Hazleton, 2006).

THE QUEST TO MEASURE RETURN ON INVESTMENT (ROI)

Although purely theoretically value is not restricted to monetary value alone, it is the kind of value for-profit companies seek. In non-profit organizations the monetary value is not embedded in a profit rationale but is a factor to be taken into account given the fact that non-profit organizations also operate in a capitalist environment in which money in most cases is necessary to the survival of the organization.

According to Grunig et al. (2002) Public Relations creates value by improving organizational effectiveness through the optimization of communication processes. These authors state that “the literature on organizational effectiveness is large and contradictory” (Grunig et al., 2002, p. 97). Building on the work of Robbins (1990) and Hall (1991) they sought to establish a connection between organizational effectiveness and investments in communication. In the excellence study the core theoretical assumption on organizational effectiveness is that relationships with stakeholders contribute to organizational goal attainment (C. Botan & Hazleton, 2006).

Notwithstanding the many merits of the Excellence Study no simple and measureable framework could be developed to answer the financial “ROI” question of practitioners in the field. In fact, the question itself was rejected altogether because deemed unanswerable on four grounds (J. E. Grunig et al., 2006, p. 35):

1. Relationships with stakeholders affect organizational performance. PR affects these relationships, thereby affecting performance. However, factors other than relationships, like competition and the economic climate, affect performance too.
2. Good relationships with stakeholders save money by avoiding costly issues. However, it is not possible to calculate the cost of something that did not happen.
3. Good relationships are built over many years. The immediate ROI therefore cannot be traced.

4. The return on good relationships is usually lumpy. Relationships with donors must be cultivated for many years before they make a major gift.

Over a period of time good relationships result in the building of a solid reputation. This explains why some scholars who have written on PR turned their attention to research on reputation management instead. In this respect the work by Van Riel (van Riel & Fombrun, 2007) is noteworthy.

HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF

When the IABC dedicated resources to stimulate research in PR it did so with the intent of establishing a sound theoretical framework that could be used by practitioners to improve their actions while at the same time making these actions more tangible (J. E. Grunig et al., 2006). However, exactly the same questions seem to surface in the domain of internal communication. We must question why this is the case.

In this paper we set out to answer why a new generation of communication practitioners continues asking questions that were answered decades ago. We do so by focusing on professionalization mechanisms in the domain of internal communication, a field closely related to PR. Central to our argument is the idea that professionalization in an age of hyper-specialization leads to the balkanization and eventually the demise of older overarching disciplines like PR (Malone, Laubacher & Johns, 2011). Before uncritically hailing the idea of further specialization we need to study closely what causes this trend and how it would affect both theory and practice.

NOT YET A DISCIPLINE BUT MORE THAN A SPECIALISM

The first question we need to answer is of a more theoretical nature. Before doing empirical research we need to know how scholars have positioned internal communication vis-à-vis Public Relations. Studies dedicated to internal communication are scarce and tend to define internal communication in terms of traditional management communication. Even Mary Welch, a scholar generally in favour of seeing internal communication as an autonomous discipline, relates it to communication between senior managers and all employees, thereby positioning it within the strategic Public Relations arm of corporate communication (Welch, 2013, p. 615).

The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) recently updated its definition of Public Relations in 2012. In their view “Public Relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics (PRSA, n.d.).” In this

definition Public Relations is a management controlled communication process aimed at fostering beneficial relationships with both internal and external stakeholders. If we view internal communication as a specialism within PR we effectively reduce it to classic management communication with the purpose of fostering a good or at least workable relationship with the workforce.

COMING OF AGE

Before we can consider internal communication to be an emerging domain different from PR we must understand the mechanisms that underlie the maturation process of an emerging discipline. For this we consulted the sociological literature on the concept of profession, the socio-psychological literature on professional identification and the literature on the concept of communities of practice.

DIFFERENT PATHS TO MATURATION

Sharing a common history could be an indication that disciplines evolved from the same starting principles. The roots of PR as a profession must be sought in the US of the early twentieth century. The idea of persuasion clearly dominated the profession at that time (Grunig et al., 2006). The history of internal communication on the other hand is less clear. Scant evidence suggests that the discipline is more related to corporate journalism in which the focus has always been more on information instead of persuasion, thereby displaying a more “neutral” character (Ruck & Yaxley, n.d.).

The concept of PR, although recognized and used globally, seems to be most closely connected to an Anglo-Saxon tradition of communication as persuasion aimed at influencing target groups and steering behaviour. Internal communication on the other hand does not seem to have such strong connotations. Therefore we draw from the literature that a seemingly different cultural, historical and geographical background are part of the explanation why professional and scholarly interest in internal communication does not seem to be easily framed as an emerging specialism within the field of PR.

MARKET CONTROL

The maturation of internal communication as a discipline independent from PR can also be related to economic benefits derived from market control. According to Magali Larson (1977) professional interest groups try to establish a monopoly on expertise and use it as a central bargaining chip to

get the privilege of self-regulation from the state. The protection enjoyed by the 'free' professions like medicine, law and engineering seems to be the end-goal many occupations, including internal communication, aspire to reach.

These ideas can also be found in the works of Caplow (1954) and Wilensky (1964) who approach professionalization as a process consisting of five stages: (1) the emergence of a full-time occupation; (2) the establishment of a training school; (3) the founding of a professional association; (4) political agitation directed towards the protection of the association by law; and (5) the adoption of a formal code (Johnson, 1972, p. 28; Pieczka & L'Etang, 2006, p. 266). As most scholars would agree, expertise can only develop if a clear body of knowledge stands at the core of the discipline and is recognized as such by other actors in the field. Therefore we must look in more detail at the literature in order to determine how internal communication measures up to public relations in terms of theoretical backing.

A BODY OF KNOWLEDGE

Already more than a decade ago Botan and Taylor (2004) wrote that PR was achieving the status of a mature discipline. According to these authors "Public Relations has become much more than just a corporate communication practice. Rather, it is a theoretically grounded and research based area that has the potential to unify a variety of applied communication areas (Botan & Taylor, 2004, p. 659)." In this respect internal communication could be considered as one of these applied communication areas. However, PR is for the most part still dominated by the Excellence Theory developed by Grunig. In contrast to what Botan and Hazleton anticipated in 2006 no "paradigm struggle" has yet emerged in the field of PR. And in the words of these same scholars "we would expect any field that fails to develop a paradigm struggle to stagnate and even to slip backwards (Botan & Hazleton, 2006, p. 11)."

Notwithstanding the fact that PR as a concept and field of study is still in full development, other related disciplines like internal communication are questioning the value of general PR theory for their domain. Indeed, the question is whether PR theory has evolved enough to accommodate the new bulk of research in neighbouring disciplines. In the case of internal communication the use of general PR theory to address existing questions has generally been low and mainly restricted to the work of authors who are familiar with the Anglo-Saxon literature.⁴ It is precisely because of this reason

⁴ A future study is needed to confirm whether there are cultural differences with regard to the kind of theoretical frameworks scholars use when addressing questions related to internal communication.

that this study focuses on how the professionalization of practitioners acts as a driver for the development of a unique social identity amongst the members of what PR scholars long considered to be subsidiary disciplines.

KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

Claiming expertise is central to the process of professionalization. In this sense Freidson (1994, p. 40) notes that “professions have no intrinsic resources other than their command over a body of knowledge and skill that has not been appropriated by others.” Pieczka and L’Etang (2006, p. 277) have identified the limited availability of abstract knowledge in PR to be an important reason why practitioners in the field have a hard time legitimizing their expertise vis-à-vis other actors, including practitioners in related emerging disciplines like internal communication.

What expertise exactly is and how it can be acquired tends to be less clear. Van Ruler (2005) argues that scholars and practitioners tend to value different kinds of knowledge and as a result have different opinions on what it means to be a professional. Deficiencies in the knowledge transfer between academic research and professional practice leads to situations where practitioners from PR-related fields like internal communication tend to ask questions that were answered by PR research decades ago.

Scholars have tried to design systems to improve knowledge transfer between the academic and professional field (Wehrmann & van Ruler, 2013). Nevertheless, research is needed to discover which professionalization mechanisms practitioners prefer and how this is linked with how these practitioners value certain types of expertise over others. Shedding new light on these mechanisms might help us understand why some communication specialists argue in favour of elevating their expertise to the level of a fully-fledged discipline independent from, but somehow related to, PR.

THE PERCEPTION OF PR

PR, both in research and in practice, does not seem able to prevent related specialisms from challenging its hegemony as the core discipline from which all theoretical principles emanate. Apart from flaws in knowledge transfer systems and attempts to control the existing market or create additional markets, we derive from the socio-psychological literature that perception can sometimes be more powerful than reality itself. The concept of social identity, of which professional identity is but one form, must also be looked at if we are to extend our knowledge on the socio-psychological effects of professionalization mechanisms.

More in particular the Social Identity Theory by Tajfel and Turner (1986) helps us understand how social identities are formed and how they are related to the concept of professional identity. Complementary to the Social Identity Theory, we used the concept of “Communities of Practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991) as a sociological construct to inform us on how perception of identity is linked to the formation of professional groups. From this body of literature we infer that socialization, of which formal education is but one form, plays an important role in the formation of professional identities, which in turn may lead to intergroup conflicts between new and established communities of practice with similar interests.

METHODS

From our literature review we infer that emerging specialist knowledge domains within the communication discipline have the potential to thoroughly disrupt the field of PR. We have chosen to take internal communication as a case to illustrate our argument.

Internal communication as a field of study is growing in importance. In large organizations internal communication is being recognized as a reality in need of management. The concept of PR does not seem able to act as the umbrella under which specialist forms of organizational communication can be placed.

Existing literature informs us that contextual factors like historical and cultural differences may have led to different evolutions and a different use of terminology within the broad domain of organizational communication. However, we must take into account that the drive of some specialisms to become recognized as full-blown professions claiming a unique expertise may also be a deliberate attempt to seize market control. Unfortunately, this proliferation of professions creates a situation in which walls are built instead of bridges. As a result both scholars and professionals are asking the same questions that were answered a long time ago.

Concepts like PR, internal communication, strategic communication, corporate communication, organizational communication, stakeholder communication all seem to build on the same communication principles. Nevertheless, the lack of a powerful central theory or set of theories creates a situation of confusion where the hype of the day further obscures the central premises needed to clarify a series of problems spanning all of the aforementioned ‘specialisms’. To do this we need to understand what is causing the confusion and why certain specialisms seem to ignore progress in neighbouring disciplines.

In our quest for answers we looked closely at the concept of professional identity and the processes of professionalization. We used a survey to gather information on the main parameters that are central to the creation of a professional identity. Therefore, we included questions related to educational background, internal communication as expert domain and professionalization mechanisms in our questionnaire. To conclude we developed an “Innovation index” to detect how open our respondents are to innovations in their field. High scores on the innovation index are needed if we want interdisciplinary efforts to succeed.

To gather our data we launched an online survey amongst the members of the Belgian Association for Internal Communication (BViC) in April 2013. This professional association encourages the exchange of best practices. As a result, access to their member database allowed us to establish a purposive sample by contacting the segment of communication professionals already interested in improving their practices.

If certification of the profession would become a reality in the future, researchers would be able to use lists from which a representative sample could be drawn. With the data available today it is not possible to know whether the profile of our respondents is comparable to that of the broader group of practitioners. What we do know is that follow-up research with a stronger focus on testing our findings amongst niche groups like early and late career practitioners could be used to further develop our theoretical constructs.

The choice to do the survey online is related to the fact that online communication is the preferred mode of interaction between the association and its members. A total number of 85 valid questionnaires were returned. This comes down to a 17 % response rate.

FINDINGS

If we look at the descriptive statistics we find that our respondents are mainly women (n 64, 75,3 %). With a mean and median of 41 years old we conclude that most participants are in their mid-career. Combined, respondents working in public sector organizations (n 34, 40 %) or healthcare (n 13, 15, 3 %) represent more than half of our sample. From the private industries we can see that the financial sector is well represented (n 10, 11,8 %). Our sample population is equally divided with half of our respondents working in organizations with less than 1000 employees and the other half working in big organizations with more than 1000 employees.

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

Scholars who have written on the topic of professionalization all emphasize that establishing a shared “body of knowledge” is central to the idea of elaborating a professional identity (Cullen, 1978; Freidson, 1994; Larson, 1977; Yang & Taylor, 2014). This body of knowledge can develop entirely independently from practitioners’ day-to-day activities (Larson, 1977). In the field of PR the excellence/symmetry model developed by Grunig still maintains its hegemonic position (C. Botan & Hazleton, 2006; J. E. Grunig et al., 2006). In the case of internal communication we have found a vibrant community of internal communicators who, most importantly, identify themselves as such. However, internal communication as a field of study is under-theorized and can, to this day, not yet claim the existence of a unique expertise different from related disciplines.

When looking at our data we find that internal communication practitioners are on average well educated. All except two enjoyed at least some form of higher education. As expected most of them have a background in communication studies or linguistics. This reveals that recruiters, when hiring for a job in (internal) communication, do not consider a degree in communication a *sine qua non*. We do however notice that an educational background in the humanities or social sciences is considered compatible with the job profile.

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION AS EXPERT DOMAIN

In his study on professionalism Eliot Freidson (1994, p. 144) refers to the work of Goode (1957) who “characterized a profession as a “community”, a group that shares a common experience and identity.” This common identity can be the result of affiliation with a shared educational background or socialization during a common professional trajectory. However, to this day we know very little about the professionals who take up internal communication responsibilities. We could have asked them which profession they identify with the most. However, this would only provide us with a snapshot of the subjective opinion of practitioners at a given point. Such data would be highly susceptible to rapid changes in terminology. Instead we compared the number of years respondents worked for their current employer with the number of years they carried out tasks related to internal communication. A high number of cases where respondents have taken up internal communication related tasks throughout their career while working in succession for different employers would give us a measurable indication that internal communication is considered a profession in its own right on which people can build an entire career.

Contrary to what some active ambassadors of the internal communication discipline claim our data show that most respondents only started to build up expertise in internal communication after they started working for their current employer. We can therefore say that internal communication cannot as yet be considered to be a separate discipline in which expertise is acquired throughout someone's career. These results are congruent with the finding that the majority of respondents (n 58, 68,2 %) believe that internal communication should belong to the responsibility of a general communication department spanning all fields of communication. Only a minority (n 4, 4,7 %) thinks internal communication should form its own department.

PROFESSIONALIZATION: EXISTING PRACTICES AND DELIVERY PREFERENCES

Given the lack of theory in the domain of internal communication as a field of study no efforts have, to the best of our knowledge, as yet been made to test whether PR theory can provide adequate answers to questions related to internal communication issues. At the same time we witness the increasing popularity of professional associations whose members, through all sorts of measures like accreditation and certification, try to establish their specialism as a profession in its own right. Unfortunately, the drive to claim expertise seems to ignore the developments in neighbouring, often older, disciplines. We have used our data to understand why existing knowledge does not seem to be adopted by these new expert groups.

Based on the literature we tested a first barrier found in van Ruler's (2005) claim that practitioners and scholars value different kinds of knowledge. We did this by asking our respondents how they keep track of new developments in the field of internal communication. After defining multiple response sets we found that a large majority followed extra courses and workshops (87,5 % of cases), joined professional associations (86,3 % of cases) and kept informal contacts with colleagues (85,0 % of cases). Reading professional literature (78,8 % of cases) and attending academic lectures and colloquia (66,3 % of cases) are decidedly less popular.

From these results we infer that van Ruler's (2005) claim can indeed be confirmed. We did find that practitioners would rather share information during professional workshops and informal gatherings instead of reading books and attending academic lectures. This partially explains why developments in research do not seem to trickle down to practitioners in the field.

We defined a similar response set to probe which activities inspired our respondents most. Our data show a similar pattern comparable to the

results of the previous question. However, we did notice that response percentages regarding this question were lower than in the previous question. This can be an indication that respondents are not yet satisfied with the existing delivery systems of knowledge transfer.

INNOVATIVENESS INDEX

The results of our survey indicate that internal communication practitioners do not seem to look at research in order to find answers to questions they may have with regard to their professional activities. In this paper we examined whether the practitioners were open to innovations in their field. This parameter is crucial if prototypes designed to improve knowledge transfer between scholars and academics, like the one developed by Wehrmann & van Ruler (2013), are to have any chance of success.

Our index initially consisted of five questions measured on a five-point Likert scale. Based on a reliability analysis followed by an item analysis we decided to use only four questions. This resulted in a Cronbach Alpha of .619, which is acceptable according to George & Mallery (2014). With a theoretical minimum score of 4 and a maximum of 20 we can conclude that a mean and a median of 15 with a standard deviation of 2,13 can be considered “high”. Our respondents therefore seem to be innovative when it comes to adopting new tools and techniques in their field.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this paper we focused on the question of how professionalization in the field of internal communication affects PR theory and practice. In the PR literature we found internal communication to be an increasingly popular topic. This runs parallel with the strong advocacy of an active group of practitioners who identify themselves as internal communication professionals in favour of elevating their specialism to the status of a profession. We analysed the literature on professionalization in-depth to assess whether these claims have any theoretical ground of justification. Additionally we wanted to know where the desire for recognition and thus the establishment of a distinct community of practice comes from.

In the literature we found several parameters to be potential drivers in the social identity formation process. The drivers we found to be important are culture, market control, theory, knowledge transfer mechanisms and perception. We used insights from the Social Identity Theory (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and the work on communities of practice

(Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) to elaborate further on knowledge transfer systems as vectors of professionalization processes. This choice is informed by the fact that there is little known about how existing knowledge transfer systems contribute to the emergence and development of a community of practice with an own specific professional social identity.

Most scholars would agree that PR is still considered to be the overarching discipline spanning all forms of organizational communication. However, we did learn that internal communication grew out of different professional and cultural backgrounds. Whether the identity creation process of this emerging domain is the result of efforts from a dedicated group of practitioners attempting to seize control of a niche within the market is plausible but cannot be tested empirically by means of a survey like the one used in this study.

From an academic perspective the literature review did reveal that the place of theory development in the field of PR remains slow compared to other domains like the computer sciences (C. Botan & Hazleton, 2006). This could potentially have triggered scholars interested in internal communication to build on alternative theoretical principles to support their research. The absence of a strong theoretical underpinning could additionally have encouraged practitioners to value other kinds of knowledge. A last element we drew from the literature is that the perception of PR also plays a substantial role in current developments.

By means of an online survey we sought to expand our knowledge on how socialization mechanisms contribute to the efforts of internal communication specialists to create a common identity different from PR. In doing this we effectively tackled an issue that has been neglected in PR literature. All respondents were members of the same community of practice, in this case the Belgian Association for Internal Communication.

Contrary to what we expected due to our review of the literature on professionalization, we discovered that most internal communicators are highly educated but are not recruited from one specific discipline. Most of these practitioners did not build their career in internal communication. An overwhelming majority is not in favour of establishing specialist internal communication departments. The ones who try to professionalize their actions prefer hands-on knowledge gained through peer contacts and professional workshops instead of following developments in academic research.

From these results we infer that only a small group of internal communicators advocate the idea of internal communication as a

field independent from PR. There is, however, a strong need to improve knowledge transfer systems between scholars and practitioners. In this light the work by Wehrmann and van Ruler (2013) is particularly valuable. At last, scholars should renew their efforts to apply and expand PR theory in all specialist domains of organizational communication.

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EMPOWERING EMPLOYEES THROUGH COMMUNICATIVE LEADERSHIP

Abstract

In 21st century organizations, the need for empowering approaches to leadership, such as coach and facilitator of dialogue has been advocated and the traditional command-and-control management challenged. A concept characterized by dialogue and inclusive and responsive forms of communication as well as involvement in decision-making is “communicative leadership”, used since a decade in Swedish private and public organizations. This study analysed how leaders perceive the contribution of communicative leadership to employee empowerment in a multinational business organization. Findings illustrate that leaders’ communication strategies in relation to employee participation, engagement and empowerment diverge in important ways. A communicative leadership strategy including an informal bottom-up approach involving dialogue and responsive communication behaviours invited employees to make their voices heard and participate in decision-making, and thus contributed to a higher level of employee empowerment. The findings of this study contribute to extend and modulate previous research on the outcomes of leaders’ communication, particularly transformational leadership communication behaviours. A communication-based conceptualization of employee empowerment is contributed, including employees’ abilities to voice concerns, influence work in dialogue and take individual action.

Keywords: Communicative leadership; employee empowerment; employee engagement

INTRODUCTION

There is growing awareness that leadership researchers need to focus more on the role of employees' agency, and stop treating leaders as superheroes with passive followers. In 21st century organizations, leaders face the challenges of managing a constantly changing internal and external environment, new communication technology extending the possibilities for employees' networking, and increased specialization of work, which demands highly skilled employees. In this situation, leaders are no longer experts in possession of all answers, but instead need to acknowledge and rely on subordinates' knowledge. Thus, the traditional command - and - control management is considered out-dated and alternative management roles are advocated, such as coach and facilitator of dialogue, which are consistent with more self-directed and empowering approaches to leadership (Raelin, 2013). This type of leadership is seen as a way to encourage employee autonomy, and is in contrast with approaches to leadership focusing on influencing employees in order to create engagement (Berson & Avolio, 2004; Breevaart et al., 2014).

Communicative lenses to the study of leadership have emerged during the past decade in which researchers stress that leadership is socially co-constructed, relational and dependent on the organizational and macro-social context (Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014; Johansson, 2003). Communication in leadership processes is thus seen as enacted by both leaders and employees who actively participate in dynamic interaction (Kramer & Crespy, 2011). A recent conceptualization of "communicative leadership," included empowering communication behaviours of leaders and defined a communicative leader as: "one who engages employees in dialogue, actively shares and seeks feedback, practices participative decision making, and is perceived as open and involved" (Johansson et al., 2014). The need to encourage focus on employee communication is articulated (Heide & Simonsson, 2011; Ruck & Welch, 2012; Welch, 2011), although empirical research on communicative leadership as a type of empowering leadership communication has not yet surfaced. This study seeks to answer how communicative leadership may contribute to employee empowerment in a multinational business organization. To this end, theory on communicative leadership and employee empowerment was employed and interviews with leaders were analysed. The findings of this study contribute to extend and modulate previous research on the outcomes of leaders' communication, for example transformational leadership communication behaviours,

and provide a developed conceptualization of employee empowerment, including a communication aspect of empowerment.

LEADERSHIP APPROACHES

There is no shortage of leadership research and approaches – in fact, leadership is probably one of the most studied research topics in social science. Researchers studying leadership have focused on leaders' traits and styles, and developed situational, transactional, transformational, discursive and authentic leadership approaches, just to name a few (Bryman, Collinson, Grint, Jackson, & Uhl-Bien, 2011). The plethora of theories are not surprising, since leaders beyond dispute are important for individuals, teams, and organizations, and the search for the efficient, highly performing organizations continues. Considering this body of theories and empirical findings, one can ask why do we need to continue to develop new approaches to the study of leadership? Primarily three reasons answer to the need of developing research on communicative leadership. First, there is the general argument that the world around us is constantly changing and so are organizations that consequently need suitable forms of leadership. In 21st century organizations, co-workers' understanding and insight, collaboration, and mutual learning are more important than ever before, and facilitated by empowering forms of leadership communication (Raelin, 2013). A second argument is that although leadership research is abundant, research on leadership communication is not. Few organizational researchers focus on communicative aspects of leadership (Balogun & Johnson, 2004). On the other hand, relatively few communication scholars study leadership (Barge, 2014; Fairhurst, 2007; Johansson, 2003; Madlock, Martin, Bogdan, & Ervin, 2007; Simonsson, 2002; Tourish, 2014). In comparison to other fields within the abundant leadership research, we thus see that leadership communication is understudied (Tourish & Jackson, 2008). A third reason is that leaders' communication can have positive as well as disastrous effects (Hargie & Tourish, 2009; Tourish, 2013). While recent important efforts have been concentrated around leaders' destructive communication (Krasikova, Green, & LeBreton, 2013; Tourish & Vatcha, 2005), there is still a need to focus on positive aspects of leadership (Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014), such as outcomes of leaders' communication in terms of employee empowerment.

LEADERSHIP DEFINED

Definitions of leadership mirror ontological and epistemological standpoints and are as abundant as the number of research approaches. Accordingly, definitions focus on individual leader characteristics, the leader-follower dyad, group and organization leadership etc. Here, leadership is seen as a dynamic process constituted in communication between people contributing to common activity. Just as communication has a constitutive role for organizing (Putnam & Nicotera, 2009), communication has a constitutive role for leadership, which means that communication forms and produces features, relationships and outcomes. This is in line with research claiming that leadership is socially co-constructed, relational and dependent on the organizational and macro-social context (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010; Johansson, 2003; Simonsson, 2002). Communication in leadership processes is thus seen as enacted by both leaders and employees who actively participate in dynamic interaction (Kramer & Crespy, 2011).

COMMUNICATIVE LEADERSHIP

Communicative leadership is a concept used in Swedish organizations for over a decade with reference to leaders who “engage others in communication”. In Swedish language the concept is not equivalent to “communicating” leadership, meaning that all that leaders do is communicative (cf. Barge, 2014), since that is a long recognized assumption in most Swedish organizations. Rather, the concept connotes that communicative leaders are “better” communicators than leaders that are not being communicative; that is a quality component is characterizing communicative leaders. The concept is also above the individual level, carrying the assumption that it is not just an individual trait or behaviour, but communicative leadership can be systematically developed in an organization.

A recent theoretical conceptualization defined a communicative leader as: “one who engages employees in dialogue, actively shares and seeks feedback, practices participative decision making, and is perceived as open and involved” (Johansson et al., 2014, p. 155). Four central categories: *structuring*, *facilitating*, *relating*, and *representing* were found to cover important aspects of leaders’ communication behaviour within, between and outside organizational units. These include several “empowering” leadership behaviours, such as for example coaching, encouraging self-management, and upward influence. Eight principles of communicative

leadership were proposed, integrating research findings from quantitative and qualitative research traditions of leaders' communication behaviour and discourse. Several of these principles have empowering characteristics. The first principle highlights the coaching and enabling of employees to be self-managing. The third principle focuses on setting clear expectations through giving and seeking positive and negative feedback. The sixth principle concerns conveying direction and assisting others in achieving their goals through engaging in daily conversations and listening to employees' perceptions of their work situations and problems (Johansson et al., 2014).

The authors focus on leaders' communication behaviours served to develop a theoretical framework assisting in developing leaders' communication competence, however they stress that communication between leaders and employees is co-constructed and context-dependent, and that future research ought to focus more on employees' roles in the (social) co-construction of leadership.

COMMUNICATIVE LEADERSHIP VERSUS OTHER APPROACHES TO LEADERSHIP COMMUNICATION

There are certain leadership theories that seem similar to or overlapping with communicative leadership. However, some significant differences exist, therefore it is of interest here to compare similarities and differences with LMX-theory, LMCQ-theory, discursive leadership and transformational leadership.

LMX-THEORY

Leader-member relationship theory (LMX) concerns factors influencing the dyadic relationship between leaders and members and its outcomes (Graen, Rowold, & Heinritz, 2010; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Communication behaviour, in this tradition is seen to influence for example work group commitment (Abu Bakar, Dilbeck, & McCroskey, 2010). In this approach, leadership communication is based on the transmission view of communication, a linear process, in which a leader influences a person or group. This is different from the constructive stance of the communicative leadership approach, which also recognizes the influence on the leadership communication process of the organizational and social micro and macro contexts. Moreover, in the LMX tradition, members are traditionally seen as rather passive followers influenced by their leader.

LMCQ-THEORY

The LMCQ-theory extends and develops the LMX-theory by focusing on the communicative aspects of leader-member relationships. The purpose is to measure the quality of conversations between leaders and members in the workplace (Jian, Shi, & Dalisay, 2014). This approach also employs a psychometric perspective, however it is open for the dynamic and multidirectional character of the communication between leaders and members. Just as the LMX-theory, the LMCQ-theory focuses on dyadic relationships and does not account for communication between leaders and teams or larger units.

DISCURSIVE LEADERSHIP

Discursive leadership is grounded in social constructionism, and engages in conversation with leadership psychology through arguing the important influence of the social context where leadership is enacted and the leadership processes involving more actors than the leader alone (Fairhurst, 2007). Leadership is more than leaders' traits, and cognitions, dependent and independent variables. Both language and interaction on micro-level (little-d discourse) and talk patterns, ideas, logics and assumptions on macro-level (big-D Discourse) are constitutive of leadership processes according to this approach. The main assumptions of Communicative leadership are influenced by and dependent on discursive leadership theory, although Communicative leadership theory is more focused on leaders' responsibility and contribution to the co-constructed communication than on co-workers¹ and contexts.

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Transformational leadership is the most studied and debated theory within the leadership field during recent years (Díaz-Sáenz, 2011). This theory states that leaders ensure organizational performance by transforming their followers through projecting charisma and creating compelling visions of the future. It is a theory that focuses on how leaders' behaviours influence their followers' commitment (Tyssen, Wald, & Heidenreich, 2014). Recent results highlight communication behaviours of leaders such as listening, and two-way communication in order to achieve their objectives. This may seem similar to and overlapping with the communicative leadership theory. However, the fundamental difference is that according to transformational leadership, the leaders lead and followers are to follow. That is, leaders have

¹ Co-worker is interchangeable with employee throughout the text.

the privilege of formulating the objectives that followers must comply with, and employee commitment is a means to achieve employees' supporting actions: "committed subordinates, unlike uncommitted employees, would try to do the right thing. However, committed individuals might at some point fail to recognize what needs to be done because they lack information" (Tyssen et al., 2014, p. 386).

In the communicative leadership approach, responsive behaviours such as listening and upward influence through involving co-workers in decision-making contribute to distribute power not concentrate it. The transformational leadership approach has also received severe criticism for its over-emphasis on leaders, and its resemblance with the creation of destructive cults where powerful leaders are followed by (blindly) devoted subordinates (Tourish, 2013).

ENGAGED AND EMPOWERED EMPLOYEES

A number of concepts highlighting the important role of employees in organizations have surfaced in the academic literature recently. *Employee engagement* (sometimes job/work engagement are used) and *employee empowerment* are both seen as influenced by *empowering leadership*. There are some fundamental differences between engagement and empowerment important to note.

Employee engagement has been much focused during the past ten years, due to the belief that it is associated with important employee and organization outcomes. Previous studies show that outcomes related to employee engagement are found on the individual level, for example job attitudes, job performance, health and wellness and decreased employee turnover intentions; and organizational level outcomes such as customer satisfaction, productivity, profitability, and safety (Saks & Gruman, 2014). Kahn defined personal engagement as "the harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles; in engagement people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances" (Kahn, 1990, p. 694). In other words, Rich, Lepine and Crawford (2010) conceptualized engaged individuals as investing their hands, head, and heart in their performance (cf. Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995). These conceptualizations are more encompassing than for example job satisfaction or involvement.

Engagement is seen as a mediating variable, influenced by a host of antecedent variables, which mediates the relationship between antecedent

variables and work outcomes (Saks & Gruman, 2014). Leadership is identified as one of the important antecedent variables of employee engagement in addition to job resources and demands. For example, transformational leadership, empowering leadership, and leader-member exchange (LMX) have been positively related to engagement (Bakker, Albrecht, & Leiter, 2011; Christian, Garza, & Slaughter, 2011; Macey & Schneider, 2008). Saks and Gruman note that the influence of leadership has received less research attention than job resources and propose that certain forms of leadership (transformational, empowering, and LMX) is directly related to job resources and job demands, and indirectly related to the psychological conditions and different types of employee engagement (2014).

EMPLOYEE EMPOWERMENT

Employee empowerment is a concept related to participative management and employee involvement (Park, Kim, & Krishna, 2014), and the interest from researchers in valuing employees is increasing. Quinn and Spreitzer (1997) characterized employee empowerment as self-determination (freedom to choose how to do the work), meaningfulness (feeling the value of the job), competence (confidence in the ability to do work well), and impact (influence on their work) (cf. Spreitzer, 1995). Bowen and Lawler (1992) noted that when employees have knowledge about organizational performance and are allowed to make important decisions, it makes them take responsibility for and ownership of their jobs.

Empowering leadership has been defined as “the process of implementing conditions that enable sharing power with an employee by delineating the significance of the employee’s job, providing greater decision-making autonomy, expressing confidence in the employee’s capabilities, and removing hindrances to performance” (Tuckey, Bakker, & Dollard, 2012). This definition means that leaders share their power and allow greater decision-making autonomy for employees and express confidence in their work and capabilities. Tuckey, Bakker and Dollard saw that leaders who delegated responsibility and encouraged independent action as well as teamwork empowered their followers and created better working conditions for them – also, this resulted in increased engagement. Leaders thus, played an important role by creating the right work environment in which followers could thrive. Empowering leadership positively predicts newcomer creativity, and that this relationship is contingent on the organizational context (Zhang & Bartol, 2010).

Park et al. (2014) highlight the important communication roles of empowered employees who contribute to innovative organizing. They note that an effective organization must have a system for employees to participate in managerial processes in order to help identifying emerging threats, opportunities, novel and creative ideas and practices.

To sum up, both employee engagement and empowerment are psychological constructs and both are related to individual's actions that contribute to enhancing organizational performance. However, there is a fundamental difference between these two concepts. Engagement reinforces the dominance of leaders over employees, while empowerment assumes that employees that are allowed freedom to act and influence their work contribute to a creative and innovative environment, and ultimately to organizational performance. In order to focus on employees' freedom to act and how leadership communication contributes to reducing leader domination, I will use the concept of employee empowerment in the following study.

Leadership communication aspects related to employee empowerment have not been sufficiently analysed previously. Consequently, the following two research questions are important to answer.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RQ 1) How do leaders perceive the relationship between their communication and outcomes on individual, team, and organizational level?

RQ 2) How can communicative leadership contribute to employee empowerment in organizations according to leaders?

ORGANIZATIONAL SETTING

The study was undertaken in a large Swedish multinational manufacturing organization with headquarters in Sweden and operations and sales offices all over the world. The organization is well known for pioneering work in communicative leadership, and the strategic corporate communication department has been working with a Communicative Leadership Index, aimed at evaluating and developing leaders' communication competence since the end of the 1990s (Nordblom & Hamrefors, 2007). The organization was purposefully selected for this study, based on its history of working with the concept of communicative leadership, and also based on the participation in a research project with the purpose of defining and exploring the concept of communicative leadership.

METHOD

Interviews were chosen as research method due to the purpose of the study to focus on leaders' experiences and understandings of communicative leadership and employee empowerment, and how they perceive the outcomes of leaders' communication with employees (Tracy, 2013). Interviews are suited to this type of research questions of descriptive or exploratory type, that focus on "what" and "how" social processes are enacted in everyday life, and how individuals make their experiences meaningful (Johnson & Rowlands, 2012).

Data for this study were collected as part of a larger project² and consists of semi-structured interviews with 32 leaders in ten units of the business organization. The selection of leaders was designed in order to comprise a variety of roles and experiences (Patton, 2002). Accordingly, both male and female leaders representing top, middle and first line positions, as well as leaders of white- and blue-collar personnel from both sales and production units were approached and asked to participate voluntarily. Age was not a criterion used for selection. All interviewees are termed leaders following the convention of the organization; eight are senior managers, eighteen are middle managers, and six are first-line managers or team leaders. Leaders were interviewed in Sweden (17 men, 4 women), France (3 men), and the USA (7 men, 1 woman). Interviews with Swedish leaders were conducted in Swedish and translated into English. American and French leaders were interviewed in English or English/French and then translated. The proportion of women in the sample is 15,6%, which is close to the proportion of women in the organization 17%, and the proportion of female leaders, which is also 17% according to the Annual report. The interviews were audio recorded and fully transcribed.

Individual interviews were conducted and adapted to leaders' ability to find suitable time for the interview. Before the interviews, they were informed about the purpose of the study and the confidentiality of the material. They were asked a number of questions concerning their experiences of and opinions on leadership, communication, outcomes of leaders' communication, and what it means to be a "communicative leader". The one-on-one atmosphere invited leaders to reflect in-depth on their own experiences and philosophies of leadership (Harris, Li, Boswell, Zhang, & Xie, 2014).

² Communicative Leadership: Conceptualization, Analysis and Development of Core Competence. Funded by the Swedish Knowledge Foundation, grant nr 2010-0226. Directed by the author. [<http://www.miun.se/forskning/forskningscentra/demicom/core/kommunikativt-ledarskap>]

Interview dynamics can be constrained by the demands of time and place; particularly interviewing elites can be challenging and calls into question issues of accessibility, power, and control (Odendahl & Shaw, 2001). In this case some of the interviewed leaders may be termed business elites, however, leaders appeared to openly discuss their experiences without time pressure. There were no apparent differences in how leaders from top echelons or lower levels in the organization respectively disclosed their experiences and opinions. They seemed not to protect themselves, nor were they difficult to access. Most leaders rather provided wordy descriptions of both positive and negative experiences related to leaders' communicative actions, as well as attitudes, behaviours and characteristics of "communicative" leaders, which were compared to the theoretical concepts of employee engagement and empowerment.

DATA ANALYSIS

Interview data was analysed employing a qualitative iterative approach that involved comparing interviewees' practice based experiences of leaders' communication, and conceptualizations of communicative leadership with the theoretical concepts of employee engagement and empowerment (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011). The analysis was carried out in three steps. In the first step, the transcripts were carefully read, and descriptions of leader communication outcomes were collected. In the next step the transcripts were scrutinized for concepts that characterized respondents' descriptions of communicative leaders, including meaningful words or descriptive sentences (Tracy, 2013). In the third step, these concepts and statements were compared to the theoretical concepts of employee engagement and empowerment, and illustrative quotes were collected.

RESULTS

Findings illustrate a number of communication outcomes that often were seen as interrelated, such as employee participation, engagement and empowerment through communicative leadership. The first research question asked how leaders perceived the relationship between their communication and outcomes on individual, team, and organizational level.

Table 1 details the perceived outcomes of leaders' communication. As illustrated in the table, many of these outcomes are positive and believed to contribute to good relationships between leaders and their co-workers, and can also be said to characterize a good work environment.

The outcomes were attributed to three levels: the individual level, the team or unit level, and the organizational level. In the table, individual and team level communication outcomes are related to employee engagement and employee empowerment, respectively, and separated, although in the discussions with interviewees these concepts were sometimes held together.

LEVEL	OUTCOMES OF COMMUNICATION CONTRIBUTING TO ENGAGEMENT	OUTCOMES OF COMMUNICATION CONTRIBUTING TO EMPOWERMENT
INDIVIDUAL	Trust Understanding Acceptance Motivation Morale Meaningfulness Job satisfaction Pride Knowledge (goals, markets' development, other teams' work, individual's/ teams' problems)	Participation Involvement Engagement Respect Voice (incl. critique) Courage Energy - Stress Influence Independent action Independent thinking Creativity Individual performance
TEAM	Understanding Problem solving Consensus Commitment Group cohesion Atmosphere Support Less conflicts Common objectives	Cross-pollination of ideas and knowledge Performance

Table 1: Individual and team outcomes of communication

COMMUNICATION OUTCOMES RELATED TO ENGAGEMENT

Leaders who thought communication was important in order to increase employee engagement talked about communication outcomes such as trust, acceptance, motivation, morale, meaningfulness, and job satisfaction. According to these leaders, engagement was an outcome of leaders' communication.

UNDERSTANDING AND BUY-IN

Leaders that related communication outcomes to engagement highlighted the importance to create understanding in order for co-workers to act in line with the strategy and objectives:

If you think about a long rowing boat where a leader sits in the front and a leader in the end with 40 people in the middle. If no one understands why, only the leaders will

row, and if they do not understand what and how they may row out of time. So it is about getting a good movement and then you must understand why. (F4Swe)

Understanding is also related to pride, according to a Swedish leader: “They understand our objectives and what they need to do /.../ they become proud to work for the company” (F15Swe)

One of the leaders with a French background, working in the USA, said that being a communicative leader means that you create understanding through being precise:

A good communicative leader, it means that you are very precise, in what the goals are for the year. The more people that understand, the more they can do their part and the more they feel that their actions are meaningful and that’s something that the company is going to benefit from. (F23USA)

Another leader in France had a similar experience and meant that clarity sets aside concerns: “there is clarity in our teams because a communicative leader ... there’s no real doubts. /.../ there are less things to be concerned about” (F30France)

Communicative leadership is not a Swedish concept, according to a French leader:

Communication is really the tool of leadership. I don’t think it’s based in Sweden, or with [Company name]. A leading company needs to have managers that are succeeding in driving the people in a good way. Communication is really the key to getting people involved and to follow you. (F31France)

This leader thinks that communication is the key to get co-workers to follow your ideas; another Swedish leader has a similar idea:

If you are a communicative leader you of course can get the team to follow you, to get the team to pull in the same direction” /.../ you buy the ideas easier, and the work gets done in a better way, I am totally convinced about that. (F13Swe)

These quotes all illustrate that these managers relate communication to something that a leader does in order to create understanding, compliance towards objectives, and a feeling of meaningfulness. In these quotes, the leader is active, and the employee role is the one of a more passive “follower”.

COMMUNICATION OUTCOMES RELATED TO EMPOWERMENT

The second research question asked how leaders perceive that communicative leadership contribute to employee empowerment in organizations. Leaders that emphasized communicative empowering strategies highlighted a substantial number of communication outcomes, for example co-workers' independent action, voice, and creativity. These outcomes were also related to involvement, participation and engagement.

INDEPENDENT ACTION

One of the female managers pointed to the freedom of action of co-workers when they are not kept within bounds by leaders' explanations: "If leaders are good at communicating with the employees they understand what they need to do and you save a lot of time because you do not need to explain" (F2Swe).

Another top-level leader details his way of creating teams that make decisions on their own:

I have created an informal management team consisting of team-leaders and architects and try to communicate through them /.../ I want these teams to be as self managing as possible and agile in their work. And they have to make their own decisions to make progress. /.../ The only thing I communicated is the overall objectives and I participate in their project meetings to see what is happening. (F8Swe)

The expression to give the co-workers "free hands" that was used by two leaders illustrates that they have autonomy to come up with solutions and solve problems on their own: "If someone asks for help I always ask what they think, give them free hands. It is okay to come up with your own solutions. They know that it is not a good idea to come in and ask a lot of stupid questions if they can solve them on their own. I call that free hands" (F14Swe).

When leaders communicate to co-workers that they have "free hands" they are able to influence and make decisions on their own, and work autonomously even in stressful situations according to another leader (F16Swe). This kind of independent action, creates another type of employee engagement, than when the leader communicates what co-workers need to accomplish: "Leaders that are good at getting the team to think independently /.../ create a totally different employee engagement, when you have been thinking yourself and made a decision and carried it through" (F17Swe).

This kind of engagement is characterized by co-worker participation, according to another top level leader, who gives his subordinate leaders means to be communicative and involving:

You feel the participation, you are in the game /.../ through being good at communicating, I give my [subordinate] leaders means to communicate and motivate their co-workers and also feel that they are in the loop and have information and can contribute to the work. (F5Swe)

This type of involvement, where positive feedback is one communicative leadership strategy also create energy, said one of the female Swedish leaders: “You get energy if you understand that you contributed and feel that what you do is meaningful” (F10Swe).

Creative problem solving is another communication outcome related to empowerment: “When a leader is good at communicating, you get the right information for your job in the right time and the atmosphere gets problem solving, proactive, engaging and motivating, a positive spiral” (F11Swe).

Influence and participation depend on the way the leader communicates, according to a Swedish leader: “You have a real dialogue, you do not just stand and talk, people feel that they can influence” (F18Swe). It is not enough just to talk, but here he emphasizes a “real” dialogue, including listening and feedback, in order for co-workers to understand that they truly have influence.

VOICE

A number of leaders commented that communicative leadership was related to giving voice to co-workers, not just giving them information:

You can question if it is information that you want or if it is something else. I think you can inform until you die. I think there is a need to speak out on different important issues. You need to find forums where [co-workers] are allowed to talk about important issues, and that is something completely different than me standing there informing and telling stories. (F9Swe)

This leader detailed his experience and learning from collecting different input from co-workers:

I had an exercise today where we talked about a change process we are subject to. We sat down and discussed what

[people] see are the threats, possibilities and challenges in this change process. And all are in different places, [people] see different problems, and if you listen there is an enormous amount to learn. It is so easy for me as a leader to direct what can be said and not with my questions. What is possible to talk about and what is not. In that case there is no good communication. The more openly you can listen, and the more input you can permit, the easier it gets to say what needs to be said. (F9Swe)

This leader also thinks that if you do not involve co-workers, give them voice and listen to their knowledge and experience they will become frustrated and not feel well.

Leaders mentioned different communicative leadership strategies to give co-workers voice, for example to let co-workers take turns during weekly meetings, listen to perceptions and proposals, and have a “real” dialogue. Voice also contribute to individuals becoming engaged according to one of the American leaders:

“If you’re listening to them I think they feel like they have a voice in what goes on and they have a say in the direction of the company and the work that they’re doing. So I think that if you can communicate well on an individual perspective, you can get them engaged ... it’s a big advantage. (F25USA)

One of the first-line leaders told a story from the production unit, where they worked with Lean management, and standardization processes. Instead of coming with suggestions, he tried to get the co-workers to voice their ideas and come up with solutions themselves:

I left most of it up to the team /.../ I wanted them mainly to come up with the idea. And it took like three or four sessions, hour session each day, to come up with a plan. And now the guys are acting to the plan and actually it’s been a pretty good process with the team understanding what they need to do. And they came up with the idea so I know that the idea was brought in through them and wasn’t pushed down through me. Just with my help to communicate it to them. (F26USA)

This example illustrates the bottom-up approach to give the co-workers voice and influence their work situation. According to this leader, his communication strategy of facilitating their ideas created a more effective and sustainable behaviour change in the team. At the same time

it creates empowerment, since the co-workers themselves can decide how they want to shape the standardization process in their work environment. Giving voice to co-workers not only contributed to their empowerment, but also to improved decision-making:

“I think that you must be responsive. You must really listen to what they say. You should not oppose, just because you may know an answer but allowing them to say what they think. Perhaps come up with a proposal. In the end it can really be a better solution /.../ even negative criticisms can lead to something positive” (F32Swe)

This leader is open for criticism from his co-workers, and realizes that they may come up with a better idea than the leaders were anticipating.

CREATIVITY

Communicative leadership was also related to creativity by some of the leaders:

The good results of a very communicative leader are that your people will have the purpose of why they are doing certain things. You help them to release their initiative and creativity; they get more initiative to do what they are doing because they understand where they are going. The big picture /.../ Normally once you do have a job with no good communication, is kind of an order. People stop being creative, they just follow orders.” /.../ communication today is much more supportive. It's more open dialogue, in order to achieve the results /.../ so if you understand how to have a good dialogue and good communication with your people, and allow them to work and give them some freedom for their initiative and creativity you reach that next stage. (F21USA)

Once again, having a good dialogue is mentioned as a communicative leadership strategy that has empowering outcomes, this time leading to creativity and initiative.

COMMUNICATION OUTCOMES RELATED TO THE ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL

Organization level outcomes of communication were seen as stemming from leaders' communication but also from employees' engagement and empowerment, which in turn was perceived as depending on the forms and qualities of communication between leaders and employees. Leaders mentioned a number of organizational outcomes such as alignment to

strategy, fulfilment of objectives, effectiveness, organizational culture, decreased sickness rates and turnover, and increased profitability and competitiveness. Some leaders also discussed negative outcomes of deficient communication such as stress, morale issues and questioning of leadership.

The communication outcomes on organizational level were seen as linked to each other as a chain: “in the end it [leaders’ communication] improves the profitability and you get a good work climate, more positive and you have fewer sick leaves, not as high personnel turnover” (F15SWE). One senior leader expressed his experience of communicative leadership as directly impacting competition and business results:

You become more competitive, that is when you have a leader who is very communicative then you create, the company and co-workers are in consensus. You get the overall picture, with the [Company] hat on. /.../ And the bottom line is directly influenced. I have seen it in the actual figures. Those leaders who are very good communicatively get much more output. (F17SWE)

One of the American leaders commented on the relationship between communication and meeting goals and KPI’s, key performance indicators: “Well, I think you hit your goal at the end. /.../ So we hit all the KPI’s that we need to meet.” (F26USA). The KPI’s mentioned by this leader were safety, quality, delivery and earned time, hours per unit. None of the leaders advocated that communication does not make a difference for the organization as a whole, and several examples like the ones quoted above illustrated the perceived aggregated benefits of communicative leadership.

DISCUSSION

These findings add to existing knowledge on leadership and communication by investigating and demonstrating how leaders perceive the outcomes of their communication. Specifically, the relationship between communicative leadership and employee empowerment is focused. Employee empowerment (Park et al., 2014) has been advocated in response to the challenges of managing 21st century organizations where the traditional command- and control management is no longer appropriate considering the specialization of work and the skills of employees (Raelin, 2013). In this context, leaders who recognize that mutual learning and collaboration are more important than ever before, and venture to facilitate dialogue and encourage employee initiatives and autonomy are needed.

This type of “bottom-up”-leadership is in contrast with approaches to leadership focusing on strong charismatic leaders with compelling visions that are influencing employees in order to create employee engagement and organizational results (Berson & Avolio, 2004; Breevaart et al., 2014).

Findings illustrated leaders’ perceptions of the relationship between their communication and outcomes on individual, team, and organizational level to diverge in important ways. Some of the leaders illustrated more of a transformational approach to leadership in highlighting the importance of explaining the objectives to co-workers and reinforcing the need for them to understand in order to follow and become engaged (Díaz-Sáenz, 2011; Tyssen, Wald, & Heidenreich, 2014). This approach is in line with the findings of Berson and Avolio (2004) who emphasized transformational leaders’ ability to create agreement over organizational goals. Their listening, and open communication styles were used for the purpose of “conveying messages to followers” (p.642). Also LMX-theory espouses a transmission view of communication as a linear process to study the dyadic relationship between leaders and members, in which supervisory communication serves as a mediating “tool” to influence work group commitment (Abu Bakar et al., 2010). Leaders’ communication in this way reinforces the model of the “strong” and active leader and the passive follower. However, just as Sharma and Kirkman (2015) point out, transformational leaders may inspire, listen, and coach without exhibiting any empowering leadership including transferring control or power to subordinates. Even though transformational leadership behaviours were shown to influence work engagement (Breevaart et al., 2014), other factors may have greater impact on employee autonomy and employee engagement (Van Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013).

Other leaders in this study advocated communicative leadership principles such as enabling employees to be self-managing, giving and seeking positive and negative feedback, listening to co-workers perceptions of their work situation and problems, and creating a good dialogue (cf. Johansson et al., 2014). It was clear that a communicative leadership strategy including an informal bottom-up approach involving dialogue and responsive communication behaviours invited employees to make their voices heard and participate in decision-making, and thus contributed to a higher level of employee empowerment (Park et al., 2014; Quinn & Spreitzer, 1997). In this study, communicative leadership principles were empirically illustrated to be similar to what previous research termed “empowering” leadership behaviours, which emphasize sharing of power, providing greater decision-making autonomy and facilitating performance

(Sharma & Kirkman, 2015; Tuckey et al., 2012). Communicative leadership behaviours thus contribute to enhance our understanding on what leads to empowering leadership and highlight communicative aspects that are often neglected in organizational research.

Leaders in this study clearly expressed that empowering leadership behaviours which encourage employee autonomy are communicative, that is specific communicative actions like dialogue and listening involved co-workers in decision-making, gave them voice, means for taking action independently and being creative. Thus the findings reinforced the communicatively constituted, socially co-constructed, relational and context-dependent nature of leadership (Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014; Johansson, 2003; Kramer & Crespy, 2011).

The findings demonstrated that communication is an important factor both when it comes to both engagement and empowerment. Communication between leaders and co-workers was related to engagement and perceived to contribute to trust, motivation, job satisfaction, commitment and work atmosphere, just to name some of the outcomes mentioned by the leaders. Findings thus contribute to extend and modulate previous research where leadership is seen as influencing engagement, which in turn leads to work outcomes (Saks & Gruman, 2014). Clearly, it is not just leader behaviours, but leader communicative behaviours that create good relationships and engagement. Therefore, developed conceptualizations of engagement and empowerment that previously have been treated as psychological constructs need to include communication aspects that are largely missing in the literature today (Saks & Gruman, 2014; Tuckey et al., 2012; Sharma & Kirkman, 2015). To this end, the following definition of employee empowerment is proposed: employees' ability to voice their concerns, to influence their work in dialogue, and take independent action.

LIMITATIONS

This study has two important limitations. First, it only analysed leaders' perceptions of communication outcomes and the ways communicative leadership contribute to employee empowerment. Researchers were depending on getting access to organizational members and in this case, business organization representatives favoured interviews with leaders although, for research purposes, it would have been preferable to interview both employees and leaders. Obviously, employees could give better answers than leaders to questions concerning what empowerment means to them.

Second, results obtained from these interviews illustrate how leaders experience and perceive the outcomes of communication and communicative leadership. Just like in survey research, this kind of “reported” behaviour may be idealized to some or larger extent and not reflect actual practices. Thus, a mixed method approach, combining observations, discourse analysis and interviews (Johansson, 2003) would be able to confirm if espoused values are really reflected in daily communication.

FUTURE RESEARCH

While these findings explore how communicative leadership is perceived by leaders to contribute to employee empowerment in the forms of independent action, voice, and creativity, future research need to examine employees’ perspectives and perceptions on engagement and empowerment (Heide & Simonsson, 2011; Uhl-Bien, Riggio, Lowe, & Carsten, 2014). Research studying leadership as a process and focusing on how individuals or groups communicate in practice, would enhance our understanding on how communicative leadership, and outcomes such as employee engagement and empowerment is co-constructed. Also, contextual and cultural factors are important to take into consideration, since we need to study when, how, and why organizations benefit from communicative leadership and employee empowerment and creativity (Sharma & Kirkman, 2015; Zhang & Bartol, 2010). Moreover, as suggested by Park et al. (2014), both organizational systems for encouraging employee creativity and participation in managerial processes; and the communication roles of empowered employees who contribute to innovative organizing are important future fields of research.

CONCLUSION

This study contributes to the literature in several ways. It examined leaders’ perceptions of the relationship between leadership communication strategies, particularly communicative leadership, and outcomes on individual, group, and organizational level. Contributing to communicative leadership research, empirical findings demonstrate that dialogue and responsive communication behaviours was important prerequisites for employee empowerment, such as voice, which is important in order to create better decision-making and organizational learning (Adelman, 2012). According to leaders, a communicative leadership strategy invited

employees to make their voices heard and participate in decision-making, and thus contributed to a higher level of employee empowerment, as well as aggregated outcomes on the organizational level, such as profitability and performance. Moreover, the study also contributes new findings on leadership communication aspects related to employee empowerment, which have not been sufficiently analysed previously. Consequently, a new conceptualization of empowerment, including communication aspects was provided. Findings further illustrate that employee empowerment is socially constructed in communication between leaders and employees, dependent on leaders' communicative behaviours, and the socio-cultural context in their teams and organizations.

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SCIENCE AND STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION: HOW CAN UNIVERSITIES ATTRACT HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS?

Abstract

As the use of new media and the new uses of traditional media evolve in the contemporary This is a study on the use of science communication as a component of the promotional mix prepared by universities to attract high school students to their graduate and postgraduate programmes. It proposes the concept of strategic science communication, to name strategic communication practices that use science popularization to reach successful organizational performance. And this proposal was tested through a survey applied to high school students, within the area of influence of the University of Minho, in Portugal. The survey was designed according to a model of analysis developed to study the ability of strategic science communication to act on awareness (familiarity), enjoyment (appreciation), interest (voluntary involvement), opinion (way of thinking), understanding (comprehension), interaction (contact activities) and action (attitude); by extending Burns et al. (2003, p.191) vowel analogy. In the end, results point out: (1st) to the relevance of strategic communication activities in the process of promoting information and interaction with science; (2nd) to the positive effect of science communication activities in the desire to apply for a higher education institution; and (3rd) to the pertinence of the strategic science communication concept in universities' communication mix.

Keywords: Science communication; strategic science communication; strategic communication; public relations; communication in universities

INTRODUCTION

Portuguese universities have an increasing interest in Science Communication activities to non-specialized publics. This trend has been growing since the 1990s, as these institutions entered the market context, which forced them to compete for students and funding. As a consequence,

Science Communication frequently assumed marketing purposes, seeking to attract young people to graduate and postgraduate programmes. In fact, communication campaigns began inviting high school students to visit university campuses with the pretext of engaging them in the work of science - through conferences, lab experiences or personal contacts -, although the real purpose was (very often) to share information on its programmes and future careers, through communication activities designed to reach young people's emotional perceptions. The expectation was: 'the more you know, the more you love it' (Bodmer, 2010).

Following this phenomenon, we have gathered a research team with teaching careers on Basic and Social Sciences (Communication Sciences), along with a wide experience in Science Communication activities over the years, to study the use of *Strategic Science Communication* (that is, science communication activities with marketing purposes) to enhance the *awareness/understanding* of science as a mechanism to attract Portuguese high school students to universities. The study was conducted within the area of influence of the University of Minho (north of Portugal) and this work presents the results of the research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

SCIENCE COMMUNICATION

Science communication is an established area of research within Communication Sciences. It studies the efforts developed by science agents not only to share their research work within the scientific community, but also the programs that aim to inform citizens about the scientific advances and to engage them with the work of science and the life of scientists.

As is well known, science has a strong influence on all aspects of our daily life and it is crucial to the technological, social, cultural and economic growth. This is why it is essential that the whole universe of science is not confined to the space in which it is produced. In order to reach that purpose, communication is the key. Communication is the link between the production of scientific knowledge and the general public.

Traditionally, Science Communication was developed through the publication of research results in specialized journals, in thesis formats or through oral presentations in academic seminars, as expressions of a *closed by nature* community (Kuhn, 1998). However, throughout the last century, the interest in the public communication of science grew, that is,

the dissemination of science to non-specialized publics increased. And this is a key element to the democratic exercise (Bauer, 2009), as it can enhance the quality of information in the public space, improve the transparency on the application of public funding, and contribute to a more informed citizenship. This understanding was moreover advocate by the Royal Society of London on the famous report *Public Understanding of Science* (PUS), in 1985, whose main thrust was “directed at the need for scientists to learn how to communicate with the general public in all its guises, and to consider it a duty to do so” (Bodmer, 2010, p. 1). The report represents an important moment in Science Communication history, because for the first time this renowned association for the advancement of science adopted a more open attitude, towards the enhancement of the understanding and appreciation of the scientific work by the general public.

Science is that wide and complex universe of knowledge development. As Morin (1994, p. 17) states, “the question ‘what is science?’ is the one that still has no scientific answer”. Well-known scientists have proposed some very interesting definitions, as Einstein, (2005) who suggested that science is the *refinement of the common thought* or Feynman, (1998) who sees it as *an understanding of Nature*. The concept embodies experimental perspectives (Oppenheimer, 1954), social visions (Morin, 1994), methodological paradigms (Burns et al., 2003) and freethinking trends. But in its very essence, science is “the systematic enterprise of gathering knowledge about the world and organizing and condensing that knowledge into testable laws and theories” (American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1989).

However, its methods, rules, rituals and languages are hard to understand by the average citizen. In order to break this isolation, States, transnational organizations and opinion leaders advocate the development of a “scientific citizenship” (Carvalho & Cabecinhas, 2004), a concept that incorporates the value of participation in the scientific field. In addition to the benefits of science education to democracy and development, the interest of States to increase political regulation and public scrutiny on scientific research is also evident, as they face globalization phenomena, reduction on public funding capacity, and an increase in economic and political competition.

The Portuguese scenario is rather similar (Bettencourt-Dias et al., 2004). Science has broken its isolation and has sought to become more international, through the work of a scientific community that has been alerted to the importance of creating publics for science, building applied knowledge, and contributing to the nation’s growth. While fighting for national and international funding to survive, Portuguese scientists

– mostly working in our public universities – have realized that a continuous interaction with society is needed in order to get public, political and social support (Gago, 1991; Magalhães, 2014).

Although the tradition of Science Communication research is to consider only “pure science” (as Mathematics, Statistics, Engineering, Technology, Medicine, and related fields; Burns et al., 2003), we have decided to take the concept on a much boarder contemporary meaning in order to include humanities and social sciences (following Fenton et al., 1998). We find no reason to exclude these disciplines from the definition, as they are also involved in science communication activities, as our study will demonstrate. And this is the vision we took when looking at universities as science producers and science communication actors.

COMMUNICATIVE UNIVERSITIES

For centuries, academic institutions – namely public universities – were seen as sacralised ‘fountains of knowledge’, above common interests and ordinary access. Young men and women had to struggle to be admitted into such prestigious institutions. But the changing status of the university sector worldwide began in the early 1970s and it was due to the growth of *knowledge society* (Jarvis, 2001). These institutions have gone from training a selected elite, to become mass educators. Their governance models changed from “administrative universities” to “strategic management universities” (Clark, 1998). Their objectives have also been altered significantly, and they currently include solving society’s economic and social problems through the providence of lifelong education to the population. And its classical principles have been questioned, such as autonomy, collegial democracy or freethinking. Universities have become a certain kind of ‘service providers’, supplying training and technological development to communities.

Some structural changes, happening in the last century, may explain this turnover: the globalization phenomenon has brought competitiveness to the higher education sector; governments began demanding more expertise from these institutions while reducing their financial support; demographic changes led to a decline on the number of students running for higher education; and the communities have been requesting a stronger sense of accountability to these institutions. As a result, during the 1980s and 1990s, established institutions on higher education began responding to these threats by adopting an *entrepreneurial spirit* (Clark, 1998), that is, by expanding enrolments, increasing the variety of programmes and courses, cutting costs, acting competitively, and entering the advertising arena.

Since then, these organizations have been acquiring a promotional attitude that implies spending more and more time marketing themselves through 'product/service' development, advertising or branding activities. 'Marketization' in education refers precisely to the adoption of free market practices in running schools, including some business trends such as cutting 'production costs', abandoning goods no longer in demand or producing only popular products (Askehave, 2007), but also leveraging brand reputation through communication strategies (Chapleo, 2005).

Traditionally, public universities focused on their social 'prestige', which was built on the quality of their educational services and measured through the results of their graduates. More recently, however, 'image' and 'reputation' became new values for universities, or assets expected to be managed through communication programmes. Universities worldwide, then, began looking for a strategy to promote their names, logos, 'perceived quality', as a way to create 'a distinct brand personality'.

In short, towards the end of the 20th century, public universities (somewhat all over the world) assumed corporate shapes and marketing communication orientations, which became routine procedures all over our century. These trends were also felt in Portugal, as we will explain in the next section.

THE PORTUGUESE CASE

The higher education sector in Portugal has been facing a major change throughout the two last decades, and its communication became increasingly commercial.

Portugal had an elite higher education system until the 1970s, with 100.000 students in 1975/76. Since then, the number of public and private higher education institutions has increased enormously and the number of students in the system has tripled. However, regulating and financing this massive increase turned out to be a difficult task for Portuguese governments that began inducing quality regulation and economic self-sustainability during the 80s and 90s. The State believed that the best regulation model was the 'market paradigm', following international trends. Still, the Portuguese State kept an important role on the process, evaluating universities' performances and controlling information given to the market¹ (Ruão, 2008).

To market environment, economic constrains and pressures to strategic governance, Portuguese public universities responded with the

¹ Through CNAVES (the National Council of Higher Education Evaluation), 1998-2006; and A3ES (the Agency for Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Education), since 2007.

cautious development of mass communication and marketing activities, beginning in the middle nineties. Communication purposes were redefined: attracting students and funds was identified as the most important objective. The *intangible* factors became crucial to distinguish services and increase attractiveness. The classic public relations departments (with protocol and administrative communication functions) were replaced by strategic communication and marketing functions. This change on structures and communication perspectives led to some radical transformations on their traditional models. Communication became a new strategic tool to leverage cultural transformation, to enhance image, to attract students and funds, in short to react to changing pressures. Within the communication mix, Portuguese universities selected advertising, exhibitions, promotional brochures, science events, online channels, brand names and logos as their main instruments to fight for identity awareness and trust status (Ruão, 2008).

University publics were now perceived as ‘stakeholders’ and ranked differently. *Prospective students* became their most important external public, whereas in the past they were ranked on a minor position (after *state lobbying* or *peer relations*). *Evaluation agencies* and *companies* were converted into strategic publics, as fund providers. Their *students*, *media* and *opinion leaders* were assumed as relevant vehicles of information and involvement, generating *worth of mouth* effects (which is the strongest mechanisms to image development on higher education; Ivy, 2001; Kazoleas et al., 2001). *Local communities*, *authorities*, *state rulers*, *competitors* and *staff members* continued to be considered as relevant targets, but the pressure for immediate success changed the communication axis to publics understood as clients/consumers and fund providers.

STRATEGIC SCIENCE COMMUNICATION

As described above, strategic communication management – that is, the orchestrated use of messages and channels to maximize communication impact, to influence publics and to move towards well-considered organizational goals (Hallahan et al., 2007; Argenti et al., 2005) – is now common in Portuguese universities and in the international academic context. Amongst the different forms of strategic communication they use, we emphasize *strategic science communication* or the promotional process of enhancing the understanding of science as a mechanism to attract high school students to universities.

Burns and his colleagues (2003, p. 191) define Science Communication as “the use of appropriate skills, media, activities, and dialogue to produce

one or more of the following personal responses to science (the vowel analogy): **Awareness**, including familiarity with new aspects of science; **Enjoyment** or other affective responses, e.g. appreciating science as entertainment or art; **Interest**, as evidenced by voluntary involvement with science or its communication; **Opinions**, the forming, reforming or confirming of science-related attitudes; (and) **Understanding** of science, its content, processes, and social factors". Science communication to be effective implies, therefore, a strategic process that enables a set of sequential mental responses to the messages send through the most suitable channels. So, Science Communication can be strategic in process, although it was designed to promote science dissemination and education, with no marketing or commercial purposes.

What we propose to do in this paper is, then, to enlarge the conceptualization of Science Communication, in order to integrate strategic communication practices that use science popularization as a way to attract new students to the educational services managed by universities. The communication of science activities is seen, within this context, as a component of the promotional mix - along with branding, media relations, crisis communication or reputation management -, run or driven by the communication departments. And this proposal comes from our observation (Ruão, 2008) and involvement in science communication activities along the years, by which we perceived the strategic use of science education as a path to reach successful organizational performance regarding prospective students. And this is a phenomenon found in the performance of both "pure science" programs, as humanities and social science ones.

OUR STUDY

In order to test our proposal, we conducted a study on the use of *strategic science communication* to attract high school students to universities. This work follows a research we have developed in 2010 (Ruão et al., 2012), on the image of science held by Portuguese high school students, as an instrument to collect useful data for communicating and attracting them to higher education. The survey suggested that science and scientists have a very positive image amongst high school students, but it also indicated that we should rethink a boarder study. Students within our sample considered science an interesting and valuable activity, and they believed scientists were helpful and creative individuals. Their *awareness* level (familiarity) was, therefore, high and this is an important piece of

information for communicators, because it can support their work and suggest new directions for strategic communication programmes. But if awareness is high, communication should seek other more evolving effects such as *understanding*, *enjoyment* or *interest* (as suggested by Burns et al., 2003) in order to bring the public to the next level: action, by entering graduate or postgraduate programmes.

Following all these guidelines, we appointed a research question that summarizes our main concern: *how can strategic science communication attract high school students to universities?* To assess the validity of our proposal - that science communication has a strategic dimension that can produce marketing results regarding applications to universities -, a pilot study was conducted within the area of influence of the University of Minho (UMinho). The study involved 338 students, aged between 14 to 19 years, and attending the last years of high school (10th, 11th and 12th grades) in the city of Braga. We have used a survey instrument, applied to a non probabilistic sample. The survey was conducted in October 2014. The sample included male (173) and female (165) students attending different areas of study: arts, humanities, economics, sciences and technologies. The questionnaire was applied in class by the teachers selected based on their willingness to help.

The survey was designed according to a model of analysis (table 1) developed to study strategic science communication ability to act on *awareness* (familiarity), *enjoyment* (appreciation), *interest* (voluntary involvement), *opinion* (way of thinking) and *understanding* (comprehension), following Burns' vowel analogy; which was complemented with two other effects: *interaction* (contact activities) and *action* (attitude –behaviour intention). Furthermore, we assumed that this was a sequential process, as stated by the brand management literature (Aaker, 1991, or Keller, 1993). The model was designed based on the identification of the problem dimensions (strategic science communication functioning), and on the isolation of the communication phenomena involved (the extended vowel analogy). With that information, we developed a questionnaire that is presented below.

PROBLEM DIMENSIONS	QUESTION	COMMUNICATION PHENOMENA
1. FAMILIARITY WITH SCIENCE	<i>Do you think science is important for society?</i>	Awareness of Science Opinion
2. COMPREHENSION OF SCIENCE	<i>What is the work of science?</i>	Understanding of Science
3. CONTACTS WITH SCIENCE	<i>In which circumstances do you contact with science?</i>	Interaction
4. INVOLVEMENT WITH SCIENCE	<i>Which science activities do you like best?</i>	Enjoyment
5. ATTRACTION FOR SCIENCE	<i>Could science be your future profession?</i>	Interest/Action
6. ATTRACTION FOR HE	<i>Do you have plans to take a university degree?</i>	Interest/Action
7. CONTACTS WITH UMINHO	<i>How did you come in touch with the UMinho teaching projects?</i>	Interaction
8. ATTRACTION FOR UMINHO	<i>Do you have plans to apply for the UMinho?</i>	Interest/Action

Table 1: Strategic Science Communication Model of Analysis

Studies on the perceptions of science and scientists held by young people have been conducted in different countries for a long time (MacCorquodale, 1984; Lee, 1998; Jones et al., 2000; Sjöberg, 2000; and others). However, looking for a different approach to science communication activities but inspired by these recognized studies, we prepared a short questionnaire, assessing 8 matters. In question 1 (on awareness), students were asked to rank the importance of science in a scale: from totally agree, to totally disagree. Questions 2 (understanding), 3 (interaction), 4 (enjoyment), and 7 (interaction) included prepared statements, and students were asked to mark the sentences that best expressed their views on science and on contacts with the University of Minho. On questions 5, 6 and 8 (on interest and/or action), students should reveal their intentional involvement through a yes or no answer. The results are presented and discussed in the next section.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Students' gender, age and school grade were not significant to the results. There is a balance in the sample between male and female students, and their age is consistent with the school grade they are attending.

Following the 2010 results, we can confirm a high *public awareness of science* (chart 1), as the students have answered very positively to the question on the importance of science.

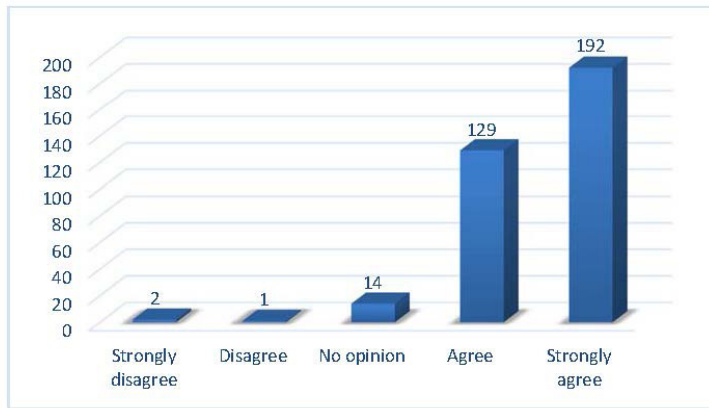


Chart 1: Public Awareness of Science
Do you think science is important for society?

Also following previous results, students presented a reductionist *public understanding of science* (table 2): mainly oriented to pure science, not considering humanities and social sciences, and not regarding science as entertainment or art.

ANSWER OPTION	FREQUENCY
Science studies mathematics and statistics	248
Science studies society	169
Science studies engineering and technology	266
Science studies arts	63
Science studies animals and plants	306
Science studies literature	50
Science studies the human being	316

Table 2: Public Understanding of Science
What is the work of science?

Students seem to make contact with science (table 3) mainly through school activities, internet, museums/exhibitions, school visits/summer camps, seminars and mass media. And they seem to have lower contacts with scientific activities through cinema, literature, arts (confirming previous analysis on the reductionist view of science), and visits to higher education institutions. Science communication is, then, associated with interaction spaces.

ANSWER OPTIONS	FREQUENCY
At school	282
In lectures, workshops, seminars, conferences or exhibitions	99
In guided tours, scientific holiday camps or laboratory experiments	156
In visits to universities	9
In science museums or live science centers	205
In cinema, literature or arts	96
In newspapers, television or radio	203
In internet and social networks	215
In family contexts	88
Other. Which?	9

Table 3: Interaction with Science
In which circumstances do you contact with Science?

On the enjoyment issue (table 4), students state they prefer to come in touch with science through *hands on* approaches, as laboratory experiments, school visits, summer holiday camps, museums, science centres, classroom activities, mass media and visits to higher education institutions. But they do not perceive seminars, websites or arts as interesting ways of interacting with scientific activities.

ANSWER OPTION	FREQUENCY
Classes	95
Laboratory experiments, guided tours or scientific camps	226
Lectures, workshops, seminars, conferences or exhibitions	31
Visits to Universities	83
Visits to science museums or live science centers	161
Programs about science (radio, television, newspapers)	88
Arts, music, cinema or literature	42
Online activities	26
Other. Which?	7

Table 4: Enjoyment with Science
Which science activities do you like best?

On question 5, about taking science as a career in the future, students had dichotomous opinions: 51% said *yes* and 47% said *no* (chart 2). In other words, they present moderate intentions for voluntary involvement.

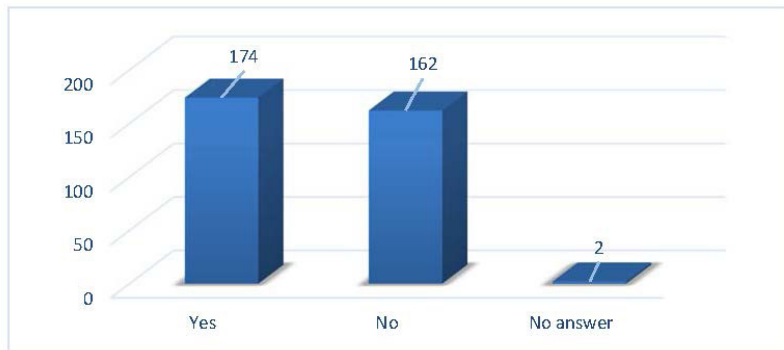


Chart 2: Interest/Action on Science
Could science be your profession in the future?

In spite of this ambivalent positioning on science involvement, most students said they would run for a higher education degree (chart 3). Regarding university access, *interest* and *action intentions* are high.

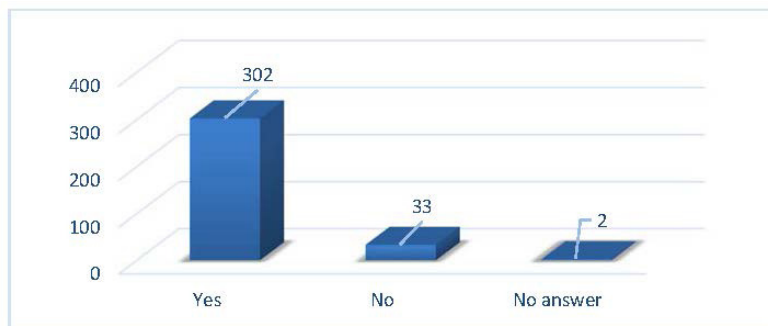


Chart 3: Interest/Action on Higher Education
Do you have plans to take a university degree?

Concerning the University of Minho (table 5), students said they came in touch with the institution mostly through family and friends, school, mass media, websites and facebook, visits to the campus, and higher education exhibitions. Fewer contacts happened by participating in the UM summer camp or the best student' program. Hence, within the quoted forms of *interaction*, we can identify strategic communication practices and science communication activities.

ANSWER OPTION	FREQUENCY
Through family and friends	302
Through news on television, newspapers or radio	148
Through the UMinho's website or facebook	114
In lectures, seminars and exhibitions held at UMinho	56
In tour guides and laboratory experiments at UMinho	69
At school (through teachers, psychologists or exhibitions)	173
In higher education fairs	67
By participating in the UMinho summer camp ("Verão no Campus")	28
By participating in the Best Students Program ("Os melhores alunos na UMinho")	12
Other. Which?	10

Table 5: Interaction with UMinho
How did you come in touch with the UMinho teaching projects?

Finally, on their *intention* to run for the University of Minho (chart 4), 69% said they will apply to the institution, but 30% believe they will look for other higher education institutions or professional solutions. Given that our sample is composed of residents in the city of Braga (or surroundings), it is significant that 30% of the students are not compelled to apply for the institution. We would expect that the city of Braga - housing the University – could be successfully convinced to apply for the UMinho. These results, however, show that there is still much work to do regarding strategic communication, to inform and engage those publics in action.

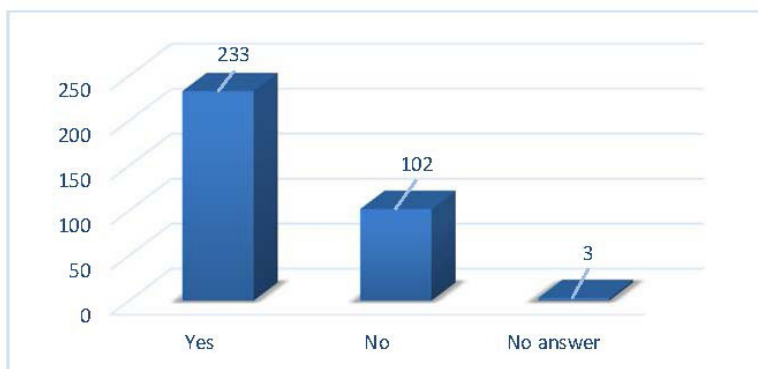


Chart 4: Interest/Action in UMinho
Do you have plans to apply to the UM?

CONCLUSIONS

The pilot survey described above was designed to analyse *how strategic science communication can attract high school students to universities*. The results can be summarized in the following ideas: (1) students within our sample have a high and positive awareness of science, but they present a reductionist understanding of the field; (2) they develop a high interaction with science through classical channels (such as school or museums) and new ones (such as internet); (3) hands on (or experimental practices) are the most enjoyed activities; (4) there is a moderate level of interest/action in Science; and (5) family and friends are the most effective informational/involvement channels. This scenario – of high awareness, incomplete understanding, some enjoyment and moderate interest in science/UM - induced a certain course of action: 69% of students think they will apply to UMinho.

Following these conclusions, we developed a set of recommendations to enhance communication efficacy (that is, to act on the increase of applications), exposed in *the Strategic Science Communication Model* (summarized in table 6). The ‘marketization’ of Science Communication demands for the establishment of goal-oriented *communication politics*, based on: a two-way communication design (Grunig, 2001), long-term communication planning practices, intentional messaging architecture to reach the targets, and regular assessment procedures.

As *strategic guidelines*, we advocate: the promotion of *hands on* activities and personal contacts; the stimulation of the word of mouth and repeated experiences with the brand; the promotion of a *cool* (young and pragmatic) image of science; and the development of the *scientists’ understanding of the public* (Burke, 2015). These guidelines should be applied to a coherent *communication mix*, based in the following techniques: branding, public relations/media relations, events, online promotion, and communication training.

We highlight this final idea that a two-way communication model demands also for the *scientists’ understanding of the public*, deconstructing their misperceptions about the audiences that help intensify miscommunication. Citizens need more information, but also need *better* communication. As stated by Burke (2015), language, length, presentation, framing, venue, medium, and sources are very important. And scientific training includes a specific language and communication devices designed to enable researchers to communicate with colleagues clearly. But this

common dialect used among scientists does not necessarily communicate ideas effectively outside their universe. Scientists speaking to the public do not spend enough time studying the lexicon and concerns of their audience to meet them where they are. And scientists are not always seen as warm, although they are generally seen as competent (Burke, 2015). However, *strategic science communication* requires scientists to get closer to their publics, in spite their reticence to public exposure.

COMMUNICATION POLITICS	
Two-way communication model	
Long-term planning	
Messaging architecture	
Evaluation system	
STRATEGIC GUIDELINES	COMMUNICATION MIX
<i>Hands on</i> and personal contacts	Events management
Word-of-mouth	Media relations programs Events management
Repeated experiences	Public Relations Brand management
<i>Cool</i> image of science	Online Communication Events management
<i>Scientists' understanding of the public (SUP)</i>	Communication Training Media Training

Table 6: The Strategic Science Communication Model

The *Strategic Science Communication Model* is, therefore, our proposal to answer the research question. We believe that the study demonstrates: (1st) the relevance of strategic communication activities in the process of promoting information and interaction with science; (2nd) the positive effect of science communication activities in the desire to apply for a higher education institution; and (3rd) the pertinence of the strategic science communication concept in universities' communication mix. Thus, *strategic science communication can attract high school students to universities* by leveraging the value of scientific knowledge, which enhances brand awareness and strengthens organizational reputation.

To finish, we should point out the limits of the questionnaire in order to put the results in perspective and to prepare a broader study.

The scientific areas attended by the students in high school (humanities, sciences, technologies, economics and arts) should have been considered, as different interests can produced diverse responses (but that could not be assessed in the study). Furthermore, the reasons why thirty per cent of the students do not want to apply to the UMinho should have been identified (with a minimal inquiry: *why?*).

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VISUAL ASPECTS OF CSR REPORTS: A SEMIOTIC AND CHRONOLOGICAL CASE ANALYSIS

Abstract

This paper presents a semiotic analysis of the CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) reports published by the French oil and gas company Total between 2004 and 2013. This diachronic analysis focuses on the visual dimension of the reports, and is aimed at understanding the visual rhetoric developed in these texts, its components and its evolution. How the images and visual layout of the reports contribute to the definition of meaning and to the valorisation of the firms and of their CSR actions? The result of the analysis is a list of different “phases” of the evolution of this visual rhetoric, and a typology of visual images. This analysis is a contribution to the exploration of the visual aspect of corporate CSR communication.

Keywords: Image; semiotics; responsibility; business; rhetoric

INTRODUCTION

This paper is a part of a wider research¹ project and focuses on the visual aspects of a specific genre of contemporary business communication: the sustainable development reports published (normally) each year by major business firms. This “genre” has developed widely in recent years, sometimes because of legal requirements, as in France and Norway (and soon in the EU in general), and globally because of the growing importance of

¹ See for example Catellani, 2012, 2014, 2015.

CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) discourse for businesses' justification and legitimization². From a critical point of view, this development can be interpreted as a clear sign of the current evolution of the so-called "new spirit of capitalism" (Boltanski & Chiapello 2005): in a context of criticism and difficulties for the reputational capital of businesses, CSR discourse has the role of a support for the (re)legitimation of economic actors.

In this paper I present a case study on CSR reports published by Total Group, an important French business in the field of energy and fuel. I chose Total because CSR is particularly "sensitive" for businesses that work in fields that have a visible and clear impact on the environment and on the life of many communities all around the globe (Libaert, 2010).

The basic research question in this paper is on the visual rhetoric developed in CSR reports: what has been the evolution of the visual aspects of these reports since the obligation for big firms to publish a CSR report, introduced by French legislation in 2001 (the so-called NRE law), came into effect? This basic question leads to some sub-questions. Which kind of images (photos, graphics, drawings...) have been used in these reports, and what has been the contribution of the visual aspects of reports to the construction of the rhetoric of CSR discourse? What is the place of internal and external stakeholders, of the environment, of industrial machines and workshops in these images? Also, which effects are developed by the layout (arrangement of elements inside the pages) of the report? What are the basic aspects of the visual dimension of the "rhetoric of praise" (Catellani, 2011a) that is, developed nowadays in businesses CSR communication? The visual aspects I analyse here can be seen as a component of an exercise of self-presentation of the firm as a responsible social actor, which combines storytelling, images, and numbers as the main rhetorical tools.

The paper presents the semiotic method used for the analysis, and some information on Total and the documents under analysis. The presentation of results will lead to some conclusions, in which an answer to our questions will be proposed, in the form of the identification of different "phases" of the evolution of Total's visual rhetoric, and of a typology of visual "solutions" and devices that contribute to a verbal and visual rhetoric of CSR.

² On CSR corporate communication, see among others Tench et al. 2014, Ihlen et al. 2011; for an approach to criticism coming from stakeholders about corporate communication, see among others Catellani, 2010a. As for a definition of CSR, see the one given by the European Union: "Most definitions of corporate social responsibility describe it as a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis" (European Commission Green Paper 2001: "Promoting a European Framework for Corporate Social Responsibility").

THE GLOBAL APPROACH: SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS

This paper develops a semiotic approach to visual communication analysis, based on the poststructuralist tradition of semiotics (Floch, 1990, 1995; Bertrand, 2000; Henault & Beyart, 2004). This qualitative approach is, in our opinion, a contribution to the enrichment of the rhetoric area of research on communication and public relations (for a presentation of this area of research, see the different texts by Ihlen Oyvind (2011). Semiotics is traditionally divided into different schools. The one based on the works of Algirdas Julien Greimas and his disciples has evolved today into an effort to identify the limits and forms that specific textual configuration (expression or signifier) create and impose on the sense-making of social actors, and also on the communication and circulation of meaning. Text is studied in order to understand the probable sense production that it can provoke in the mind of specific intended audiences; Van Leeuwen (2005, p. 4) says something similar when he affirms that the social semiotics he practices is aimed at analysing the “semiotic potential” of “semiotic resources”. This semiotic research can be seen as a form of “epokè”, a form of selective attention and distancing from the object, following the tradition of phenomenology. This “epokè” is centred on the text, which is any form of material object that can become the expression of meaning for specific “interpreters” (Catellani 2011a, 2011b, 2013). Texts (including those produced voluntarily by social actors, like websites, CSR reports and other forms of corporate communication) can be seen in this way as extremely interesting “traces” and testimonies of social interaction and culture. This approach can also be applied to the result of interviews and other types of data collected through observation and research. Social semiotics, proposed today by authors like Van Leeuwen (2005, 2010), is very close to the approach developed in this paper, even if the semiotic tradition that is at the basis of Van Leeuwen’s approach is quite different, making reference in particular, but not only, to the works of M. A. K. Halliday³. Van Leeuwen’s approach is a contribution to so-called multimodal analysis, which is the analysis of “the combination of different semiotic modes – for example, language and music – in a communicative artefact or event” (Van Leeuwen, 2005, p. 281). The post-structuralist approach proposed in the present article can also be considered

³ This approach can also be connected to the critical discourse analysis of Norman Fairclough, and in particular to his proposition of analyzing the “semiotic” aspects of social facts (2005). Semiotics can contribute to the reconstruction of sense production of different social actors, taking into consideration the interaction of discourse with the economic, political and cultural context, and putting into evidence specific forms of simplification and deformation (ideology).

a contribution to multimodal analysis, given that it takes into consideration artefacts composed of (verbal) texts and visual images.

From the point of view of concrete methodology, this approach is based on the separation of texts into different analytical “layers”: plastic level (forms, colours, positions, dimensions and their probable influence on sense-making); iconic or figurative level (objects represented in verbal or visual text and their probable connotations); enunciation and pragmatic level (forms of interaction proposed to the reader-observer through the text, the relation and the “contract” between the enunciator and the receiver); narrative dimension; and, axiological level (values and their basic articulation). In this paper I focus in particular on the plastic, iconic and enunciation aspects (see section 3 below).

THE OBJECT: CSR REPORTS BY TOTAL GROUP

I focus on a selection of CSR reports by Total published between 2004 and 2013. CSR reports are nowadays the object of different types of analysis (linguistic, narrative, and discursive: see for ex. Senkel, 2011). Reports are an important part of corporate communication, and they embody the basic imperative of “accountability” of businesses and organizations, being often the longest and most detailed support for CSR corporate communication. CSR reports have developed in recent years as a concrete effect of the growing importance of CSR as a new vision of business’ presence in society, linked to the stakeholder approach. In some countries, like France and Norway, CSR reports are compulsory for big businesses – in France, it is the case for businesses that are listed on the stock exchange⁴. CSR reports can be published separately from the main (financial) report of the firm, or as a section of it.

The reports under analysis in this paper are published by Total, a French multinational integrated oil and gas company, which is a member of the list of world “Supermajor” oil companies. Total covers the whole oil and gas chain from exploration and extraction to refining and chemical processing. Total has been the object of criticism and legal pursuits in the past because of different accidents, like the sinking of ships like the Brittany (1998) and the Erika (1999), non-ethical (presumed) behaviour, as in the

⁴ A note in one of the Total CSR reports under analysis specifies that the compulsory information is in the global report (under the form of one chapter): this means that the CSR report can be interpreted as a support developed for communication more than legal reasons, within the framework of the effort to value the firm.

case of the operations conducted in Myanmar despite EU sanctions, and corruption in other countries. The French “Observatoire de la Réputation” (reputation observatory) indicated in 2010 that the reputation of Total was bad and even becoming worse. In October 2012, the Posternak/IPSOS barometer, dedicated to the image of big national businesses in the mind of the French population, classed Total at the last place among 30 French firms.

The communication activities of the group are extensive and their analysis does not fit into the object of this research. It is worth noting the importance of ambassador strategies (as in the case of the sponsorship of a young French-Swiss F1 driver, Romain Grosjean), for a general audience, and the development of a Foundation (Total Foundation), whose activities are presented in a quite discreet way on the corporate website of the group, which contribute to its corporate communication. The negative context and criticism is sometimes present in reports, as will be shown later, under the form of “questions” addressed by specific stakeholders to the top management of the group.

METHOD: CATEGORIES AND DIMENSIONS OBSERVED IN THE TEXTS

The qualitative review of nine Total CSR reports focused on two different aspects of these texts.

SPATIAL ORGANIZATION AND LAYOUT

In this case, I focused on some aspects, like: the number of columns; the (relative) dimensions of paragraphs; specific ways of putting titles and subtitles in evidence; and, visual devices to separate and underline paragraphs and chapters (lines, colours). This observation of the layout was guided by reference to a basic opposition between continuous texts or text sections (made of long paragraphs, without much space between paragraphs), on one hand, and segmented texts (made of short paragraphs, with an evident separation between paragraphs and a global “collage effect” in the layout), on the other. This opposition can be seen as a manifestation of the abstract opposition between continuity and discontinuity. This formal (expressive) opposition can be linked to possible effects on reading and observation by the intended reader: a continuous text asks for a more continuous effort, while a more discontinuous text allows the reader to “jump” from one element to the other, allowing a more rapid and superficial reading⁵. I also

⁵ This opposition is inspired by the analysis of the Paris Underground Railway (the métro) in Floch (1990).

considered the meta-textual and para-textual structure of texts: they include all of the elements that are introduced to manage and orient reading, like titles, subtitles and notes in the margin. The quantity and evidence of meta-textual devices can be linked to the possible production of connotations of accessibility and legibility, and can improve the opening to a more partial form of reading, similar to the consultation of an encyclopaedia.

VISUAL IMAGES PRESENT IN REPORTS

In this case, I observed which iconic contents were dominant in order to establish a typology, and how plastic variables (colours in particular) influence the probable meaning production of text.

These two aspects have been analysed from the point of view of the plastic, iconic and enunciation levels identified above (section 2). Observations on the CSR reports are organized in sections below, following the basic discontinuities identified between them⁶.

FROM 2004 TO 2008: COMPLEXIFICATION AND FOUNDATION OF A STYLE

2004

The 2004 report is basically a short “PowerPoint-like” presentation, probably previewed also as a support for meetings, completely based on lists of bullet points. I already identified the importance of lists as a device of corporate rhetoric (Catellani 2011a; Boudès 2005): listing elements is a basic part of the rational “method” proposed by the philosopher René Descartes; lists create a probable connotation of control, knowledge, pedagogy and science, contributing to the “ethos” of the enunciator (the firm).

The text is organized in small paragraphs and is much segmented: points, colours and font differences contribute to the internal articulation of subjects. Diagrams and graphics complete this structure, with few photos (pure illustrations of the text). The document presents the achievements of the firm in a summary way via a solid quantitative approach.

2005

The following edition shows a radical shift towards a magazine-like structure, with longer texts and a rich “fauna” of images and visual

⁶ All the reports in French language are downloadable at the page <http://analystes-csr.total.com/actualites/publications> (visited on 26 February 2015).

aspects. Blocks of text are sometimes long (descriptions, presentation of actions), but the layout of different elements on the page creates a sort of constellation of texts and images (although less than in following editions). The number of columns and the arrangement of elements are quite regular with exceptions, like the passage from two columns to one to underline important elements, or the opening sections of chapters. The blocks are separated in a very evident way with large coloured lines, and some elements like graphics are highlighted with colours. The text presents an alternation of short and long elements, of synthesis and analysis.

Images are quite numerous in the report, in particular photos, drawings and graphics. Some different types are identifiable and they will also be common in following reports. The first is illustrations, which are images, often very iconic and “high-definition” (like photos), that double and *re-present* in a different semiotic form the same subject presented by the corresponding verbal text, without adding specific conceptual notions or participating in the development of a pedagogical explanation or analysis. Illustrations allow the addition of a second semiotic substance (image) to the textual one, increasing the impression of accessibility and redundancy of the discourse. This redundancy is never complete anyway: all new signs added to a text inevitably change, in part, its meaning⁷.

Illustrations are often anonymous. On page 44, for example, the chapter on health opens with the image of an African doctor examining a patient. The identity of the character and the space-time are not specified; the scene is “an” illustration of the subject of health, a visual anonymous duplicate of the verbal text. This kind of stereotypical situation is quite common in corporate reports (Catellani, 2014). A specific type of anonymous illustration is that of “covers” of chapters: they are images that include two pages, and the probable effect on the intended reader is an immersion in visual reality, a sort of visual spectacular parenthesis in the flux of verbal text. For example, on the pages with no number between pages 21 and 22, a large photo of a worker beside two enormous pipelines is printed with a strong effect of depth of field. This construction of the image creates a sense of contact with the firm’s men and their world (referential effect).

The second type of image is the non-anonymous illustration, each of which has a legend that specifies the content and the characters, and links the representation to a specific place and situation.

A third type is the “ethos” image: here the word “ethos” is used in the sense of Aristotelian rhetoric, and refers to the presentation of the

⁷ No sign can be considered as completely “empty” from a semantic point of view.

enunciator of a text, in order to create an effect of contact and personal relation with him/her (enunciation effect). In the 2005 report, ethos images are normally small photo portraits of the enunciator who is at the origin of a specific section of the text, starting with the CEO on page 2.

Another type of image is the pedagogical or “knowledge” image. These images are normally (in some cases, large) drawings or synthetic images that represent objects and scenes with the aim of explaining relationships, interactions and dynamics or processes. They participate in a process of explanation and of vulgarization of technical knowledge, which is a specific way for the firm to have a “citizen” role in society. The images include different visual solutions aimed at highlighting relationships, like arrows and lines, vivid colours, and simplification of the image in the form of a reduction of the “definition” (in particular with the passage from photo to drawing and synthetic techniques).

In some cases, this “pedagogical” aspect is not so significant and the images are very nearly simple illustrations, like on pages 6 and 7 of the 2005 report (figure 1). Here the reader does not learn much about oil extraction and refining; the image is used to identify and represent in a quite precise way the different objects and plants linked to the firm’s different activities (representing the development of the process from left to right). The visual part of the double page does not increase the reader’s knowledge in any significant way: they are “poor pedagogical images”. This same image on pages 6 and 7 is also an example of how the visual dimension of CSR reports is able to show the conciliation of different elements, like industry and nature (represented here by green fields and blue sea), and the harmony and conciliation of oil and other more renewable and ecological types of energy sources (wind, solar power).

A specific type of pedagogical image is the geographic map (see pages 4-5 and 13), which is a low-definition representation of the Earth aimed at highlighting a specific conceptual content (like the presence of the firm in different parts of the world).

Finally, graphics and grams constitute an important type of visual solution in the report: they can be considered an extreme form of pedagogical image, different from the previous ones because of their total aniconism (they do not represent objects and scenes, but quantities and numbers). Graphics are the perfect visual support for the rhetoric of numbers and quantity, clearly very important in corporate communication (what will later be called the “rationalistic sense effect”; see the conclusions).



Figure 1: Rapport Sociétal & Environnemental 2005, pages 6-7, Total group⁸.

2006

The following report is not very different from the previous one with respect to the layout and image types. As for the organization of pages, the separations between text blocks are less important; colours are used to isolate some blocks and to create alternation and variation inside pages. Bullet points are used in many cases. Longer and shorter paragraphs alternate in the text; many pages are built in the form of a puzzle or collage. Para-text is quite developed in the form of notes in the margin that synthesize important information (like “our achievements” during the year). Numbers are highlighted, and the probable effect is the creation of a second way of reading that jumps from one element in evidence to the other, skipping the longer blocks reserved for more interested readers.

The types of images used are the same: anonymous and non-anonymous illustrations; ethos images; pedagogical images, like the drawing that shows the procedure for capturing CO₂ on page 31; and graphics.

⁸ All images are used with the kind permission of Total.

2007

This edition of the report, which is not very different from the two previous ones, includes a specific para-textual component. The upper part of the pages present different elements linked to the subject of the page, like important numbers, sentences on engagements and achievements, and images (anonymous illustrations) in some cases. This para-textual device supports a secondary form of reading, less complete and more rapid than the “normal” one (linear and complete): the text evolves towards the form of a “hypertext”, a constellation of interconnected elements.

All types of images already identified are present. On page 5, different actors (“civil society”, “stockholders”, “employees”, etc.) are represented with simplified and stereotypical drawings. On the two following pages, 6 and 7, similar small “pictograms” are used and connected to legends (“on-shore platform”, “off-shore platform”, etc.), which create a (low level of) pedagogy, (poor pedagogical images presenting to the reader the form of different types of plants). Once again, I underline here the use of green and the presence of trees next to the plants, with evident connotations of reconciliation between industry and nature.

2008

The 2008 CSR report is divided into two parts: a first one, magazine-like, with a lot of illustrations, and an appendix with a long list of quantitative data on CSR performance.

From the point of view of layout, the text keeps the same aspect of hyper-textual “puzzle” and constellation of previous years. Like the year before, the upper part of the pages is a para-textual component with numbers and short abstracts of achievements and engagements or other information. This section is also in part a meta-text, because information added in this part obviously has an impact on the reading of the rest of the page.

From the point of view of images, the report is very rich. Ethos images – and in particular a very big one of the iconic CEO of that time, Christophe de Margerie on page 7⁹ – are present. There are also examples of poor knowledge images, like on pages 44-45, in which a big drawing representing a landscape is used to show different sources of energy. The image is clearly, once again, the place for a connotation of conciliation of nature and industry.

⁹ This portrait is not integrated in a “frame”, but the silhouette of the CEO appears in the middle of the page, directly next to his verbal text. This position, combined with the fact that he looks into the eyes of the reader, creates an effect of direct contact, a strong form of enunciation impression.

2004-2008: SYNTHESIS

The basic evolution identified between 2004 and 2008 is the passage from the very simple style of the 2004 report to a magazine-like text, with the development of a hyper-textual or collage style of layout, and the differentiation of long textual blocks and shorter elements. In later reports, starting in particular in 2006, the same subject is presented to the reader in longer and shorter versions, with the combination of verbal and visual solutions. Ethos images and pedagogical and poor pedagogical images also become quite frequent.

FROM 2009 TO 2011: HUMAN AND DIALOGIC TURN

2009

The 2009 report presents a simple layout: the body of chapters is articulated in two columns only and isolated blocks are less numerous. The para-textual component of previous editions is also strongly reduced.

Each chapter of the report is structured as an answer to a question addressed to Total by a specific “stakeholder”, a person who is in relation with the firm for various reasons (like an official of the German government or the president of an NGO). This stakeholder is represented on the opening double page of each chapter, on the left side, while on the right side there is a verbal text providing Total’s answer (“our answer”). Images contribute to a sort of “dialogic turn”, a specific strategy of “humanization” and (representation of) opening and accountability to external society and “symmetric” communication (referring to the well-known model of public relations proposed by James Grunig and Todd Hunt). The floor is given to someone other than the firm’s management, including a regular employee of Total. Nonetheless, the portraits of the CEO and other people in charge of the group are present, together with other “traces” of their identity like Mr de Margerie’s signature. These images are very strong visual “breaks” in the flux of the text; the physical presence of “the other” is highlighted.

2010

The following year’s report retains the direction of the “dialogic turn”. The layout is simpler than before 2009 (and even simpler than in 2009), with regular blocks, some long paragraphs, and a more flux-like aspect. Colours, letter dimensions, fonts, and lines are used to underline and isolate important information. The last part of the report presents indicators and is aniconic, as in earlier years.

This time each chapter opens with an image that takes up the whole double page: on the left side, a stakeholder presents a question (a student from MIT university, the director of a public institute in France, the director of another business which collaborates with Total, etc.); on the right side, Total is represented by one of its executive officers (the director of a local branch, of a business unit, etc.; see figure 2). The image shows the two characters looking into each other's eyes, even though the "meeting" is clearly not a real one, but the result of a photomontage, at least in some cases. The background of the image is also added via photomontage, and it is coherent with the subject of the chapter (for example, an image of the sea and an off-shore platform at the beginning of the chapter on risk management).



Figure 2: Rapport Société et Environnement 2010, pages 22-23, Total group.

These comic-strip-like "dialogic images" (a bubble with the question or the answer comes out of the head of each character, and their mouth is open) embody even more than the year before the desired image of opening and dialogue with stakeholders. This time, the firm is also embodied in one of its members, who is represented as open to interaction, "at the same level" as their interlocutor. These dialogic images can be considered a sub-type of "ethos image": they highlight the reality and human nature of

enunciators, stakeholders and Total's members. They are the embodiment of symmetry between the interests of Total and of other social actors around the world. The firm's voice is not anonymous or limited to the CEO; other members take the floor as its "representatives".

Besides ethos images and dialogic ethos images, the report also presents examples of illustrations and (strong and poor) pedagogic images.

2011

The 2011 report is very similar to the previous one from the point of view of layout. As for the images, a new version of "dialogic ethos images" is offered. Each chapter opens with a big photo (instead of a photomontage) that shows a "real" work situation, in which an internal or external stakeholder is "in action". For example, a member of a technical section of Total is represented in a business meeting situation working with other people around a table (pages 14-15). She addresses a question to top management about personnel policies: her question is written on the right side (without balloons) and, under the question, the person responsible for the answer is presented with a small photo. Like two years before, the "other", the human actor at work is highlighted, and their word is taken into account and opens the development of the chapter. On the other hand, the firm is still represented by concrete people, too. A human dimension is integrated into the text and balances the "digital" and verbal development of the chapters. Even the CEO, Mr de Margerie, is shown discussing with another person (in a large photo on page 2).

2009-2011: SYNTHESIS

These three reports present three different versions of a dialogic and human turn: a visual space is given to actors who are not members of Total top management; ethos images are highlighted, the variety of stakeholders and Total's members is underlined (men and women, Africans and Asians, young and older people appear in the images); a dialogic visual rhetoric is developed. This turn is accompanied by a simplification of the layout, with a decrease in the complexity of para-textual and meta-textual devices. The report tries to create the impression of a conversation between Total and its stakeholders.

2012 AND 2013: FROM DIALOGUE TO COLLAGE

2012

The 2012 report is quite exceptional in the series¹⁰. The layout is organized in two parts with a main column of text and a sort of secondary one, on the right side of the page. The second one includes different forms of meta-textual and para-textual devices: short synthesis, links, key numbers, quotations, and small icons. This column supports hyper-textual reading, based on the selection of specific chunks of data, jumping from one element to the other (discontinuous reading). Connotations of readability and accessibility to information are probably introduced: this part of the text enhances the firm's efforts at self-vulgarization.

From the point of view of the images, the report completely abandons the structure based on questions from stakeholders and answers by the firm, with big ethos images opening the chapters. Instead, it develops a sort of rich vocabulary of small abstract ideograms, small and simplified drawings representing, for example, the presence of quotations, links, added information and references to specific types of information ("integrated performance"). There is also a legend for some icons at the beginning of the report to explain their meaning. These ideograms are a contribution to the rhetoric of clarity and access to information.

The report also uses small, simplified iconic images based on the use of simplified geometrical forms (squares, circles) and colours. These small figures are used in the text as representations of the objects the verbal text is referring to. They constitute a specific type of anonymous illustration: they create a sort of systematic visual double of the verbal text. For example, when the text is talking about women who work for Total, three small icons of "working women" are shown next to it (page 12).

In some cases, these small icons are integrated in pedagogical images, like on pages 16 and 17 (figure 3). In this case, each component of the global figure (representing how Total creates value for its stakeholders) is named verbally and represented visually. This systematic visualization is quite surprising. We can interpret it as a contribution to a global "aesthetic" and "ludic" effect: the intended author of the report seems interested in creating possible connotations of simplicity, happiness, and childhood (as usual, these connotations should be verified through observation of the reactions and interpretations of real audiences).

¹⁰ Previous articles have already analysed this text, see Catellani (2014, 2015).

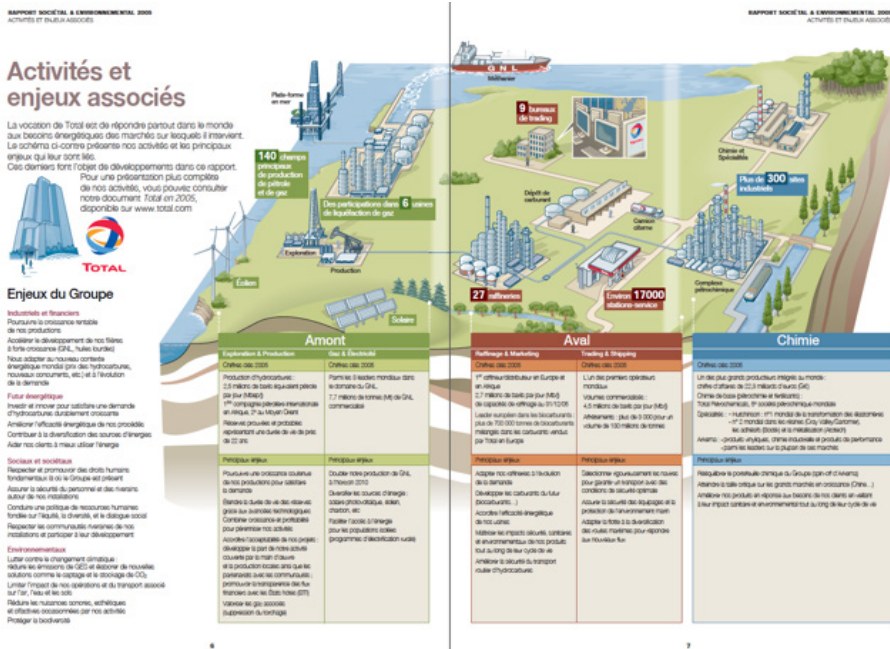


Figure 3: Rapport CSR 2012, pages 16-17, Total group.

Ethos images are still present, but in a limited number (the portrait of the CEO and other members). Many illustrations show members of Total in action: they are not technically ethos images, but they contribute to the humanization of the firm.

2013

The last edition of the CSR report, a short document of 33 pages, confirms that the dialogic structure has been abandoned. The layout is based on a strong hyper-textual or collage structure: different elements (titles, textual blocks, margin notes and images) combine on each page, encircled by large empty spaces. This is probably the most developed example of a magazine-like style of layout, very far from the traditional form of a report.

Images are very numerous, with many photographic illustrations, graphics and a very small number of pedagogical images (geographical maps). The firm does not pretend to explain complex processes or show its technical knowledge; it prefers to expose achievements and engagements combining data and short stories.

2012 AND 2013 SYNTHESIS

The two last CSR reports show that dialogic structure and images have been dropped. They also offer different layouts and meta-textual solutions to the problem of creating an aesthetic added value for the report: the creation of systematic, non-photographic visual doubles of notions via simplified icons, and the definition of a meta-textual set (2012); the intensification of the collage or hyper-textual effect on pages (2013).

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

The study of nine of Total's CSR reports leads to two different results: a typology of images that compose the visual rhetoric of these texts and the identification of different phases of the development of this rhetoric.

From a *chronological* or *diachronic* point of view, I propose the identification of four phases or "turns":

1. From 2004 to 2009: magazine style turn
2. From 2009 to 2011: dialogic turn
3. 2012: meta-textual turn
4. 2013: collage turn (back to the magazine-like style).

The comparison with ordinary, contemporary magazine style is useful to synthesize a series of formal features we detailed above, like the layout on the page of different textual and visual blocks (collage effect). This comparison can be completed with the observation that the reports, in particular the last ones, tend to get near to the dominant form of web textualities, based on shorter blocks of text which are an ideal support for "web surfing" (a discontinuous form of reading). Globally, these different "turns" demonstrate the fact that the visual rhetoric of these reports is an expressive effect of some basic imperatives of today's corporate communication: pressure to adopt forms and language that are well known and familiar for the intended public; pressure towards more consideration for stakeholders and the integration of other voices; pressure to make the business understandable and accessible, and "transparent".

On a more *synchronic* level, the analysis leads to the proposition of a typology of images.

Anonymous and non-anonymous illustrations: the image re-presents the content of the corresponding verbal text, with or without legends that

specify the time and space and other details of the situation. A sub-type is the less iconic small icon, like drawings or synthetic images (of people or objects) that visualize a notion or a subject exposed by the verbal text. These small icons can also become parts of other types, in particular, complex pedagogical or poor pedagogical images. Illustrations are the support for the creation of the impression of getting in touch with visual reality through the image (the impression that a part of the world can be seen thanks to the image), the referential effect.

Ethos images: the image, normally a photo (other visual forms, like drawings, can also be used), represents the enunciator of a text. Ethos images can be connected to strategies of “humanization” of a business and of valorisation of the central characters of the firm like the CEO or other top managers. Specific cases are the dialogic images seen in some reports. In semiotic terms, ethos images contribute to another specific basic sense effect, the impression of a direct connection with the enunciator (enunciation effect).

Pedagogic or knowledge images: in this case, an image is the support of teaching, explanation and vulgarization. Normally, these images are simplified and less iconic than most illustrations; they integrate non-iconic signs like arrows and connection lines, and are linked to different forms of legends and explanations. Images are not simply the visual double (the re-presentation) of verbal text; instead, they allow the reader to visualize different parts of an object or different phases of a process, or the relationships between different elements. The image contributes more to analysis and to the construction of meaning. Maps, in which different elements (like firms’ branches and their performance or numbers) can be connected to specific areas, are a subtype of pedagogic images. Many reports present what we called poor pedagogical images, in which the visual dimension does not add much information to verbal discourse. This is the case when a large image presents different types of plants and structures. The difference between normal and poor pedagogical images is sometimes unclear and further research could suggest more precise distinction criteria. Pedagogic images are often drawings or synthetic images, less iconic and more “artificial” than photos. The reduction of iconic resemblance and of visual richness allows the image to support the representation of relationships and connections: a lesser “definition” allows for focusing on some aspects and dimensions in particular, and the introduction of abstract elements like arrows and connection lines supports the pedagogical efficacy of these images. A possible connotation of these images is also linked to

this “artificial” condition. Controversial processes like the extraction of oil and gas through hydraulic fracturing or from tar sands can be shown in an aseptic, clean form of visual representation: it can be seen as a contribution to the definition of a particular form of “ideology”.

Graphics, including diagrams and histograms: These abstract forms of representation are very frequent; they are the perfect visual embodiment of the rhetoric of numbers and quantities, and the basis of what can be called the rationalistic sense effect, which is the impression of getting in touch with information and of controlling reality via data management, calculation and quantities. Lists of points and tables can contribute to this kind of rationalist sense effect, as I said before, as it is for pedagogical images.

These types of images can be ordered from the more iconic (images that represent their referent in the world in a very defined and faithful way) to the less iconic (images that have a more symbolic and abstract relationship with their referent). Another classification can oppose more synthetic images (illustrations, ethos images) and more analytic images, which are useful for representing processes and parts (pedagogic images).

The Total Group’s CSR reports present a rich visual rhetoric. Its analysis leads to the identification of different solutions, accents and forms, and also variations in time. This research is qualitative and limited to a small corpus of texts. Its ambition is also clearly limited. However, I think the method and results can be used for other analyses, in order to progressively build a truly global understanding of CSR reporting visual rhetoric. One of the results is the identification of three basic sense effects, each of which is linked to different types of images:

The *referential effect*: contact with a part of the empirical world through the image, which is iconic enough to let the viewer believe that reality is really “like” the representation he/she is looking at;

The *enunciation(al) effect*: for example, contact with a character, a “hero” of the business through the image which contributes to the valorisation and the building of his/her “ethos” (credibility and value);

The *rationalistic effect*: contact with the rational, quantitative and scientific essence of reality, with graphics, pedagogical images and numbers.

The three effects are present in the CSR reports I analysed. Their specific “blending” and evolution define the specific traits of Total reporting visual rhetoric. These effects and the typology of images I presented above are globally the same as I identified in corporate CSR websites and in the communication of environmentalist NGOs like Greenpeace (Catellani 2011, 2011b, 2014, 2015). This demonstrates that the research about what could

be called “responsible communication”, or communication about societal values, can lead to the identification of universal and recurring patterns.

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The discussion of empowerment and its dynamics through the contemporary communication ecology is at the core of this e-book and is organised around the theme of 'Communication for Empowerment: Citizens, Markets, Innovations'. The volume features a wide range of contributions, from political communication, public relations, advertising, internal communication, science communication and corporate social responsibility. The peer reviewed papers presented in this volume share findings and "state of the art" critical reflections, which address the core objective of the Organisational and Strategic Communication Section (OSC) of ECREA. They also continue the tradition of the promoting scientific knowledge in our broad and diverse field of research, which has been central to OSC Section's *raison d'être* since its creation in 2006.



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